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IN SIGHT OF LAND.



IN SIGHT OF LAND.

A NOVEL.

BY

LADY DUFFUS HARDY,

AUTHOR OF "BERYL FORTESCUE," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

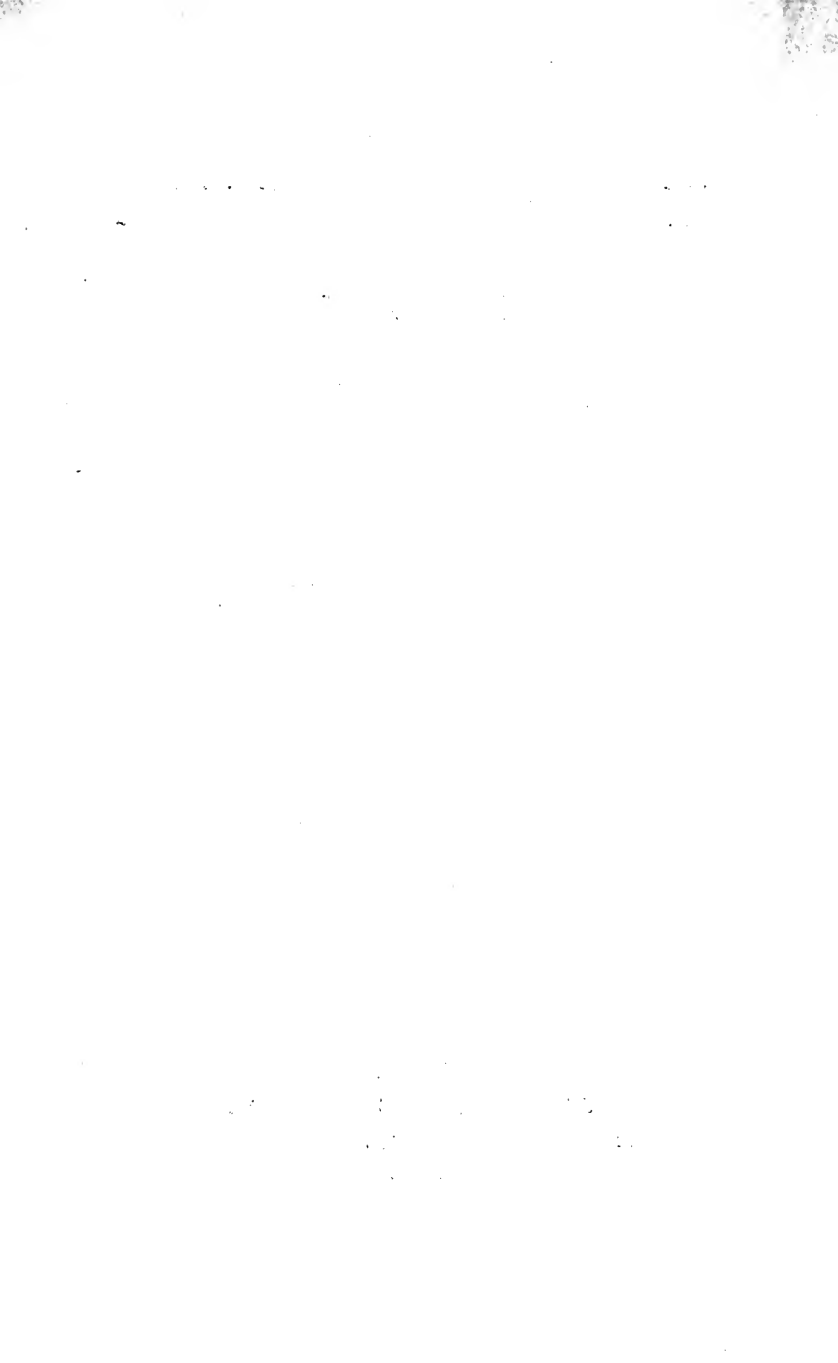
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CHAPTER I.

THE NEW TENANTS.

WHO are the people at the Manor House ? Where have they come from ? and why have they come to Cornwall ? These questions greatly agitated the good folk of Penally ; the wondering meandered along the coast, and swept in tiny waves of curiosity into the rugged huts of the fishermen, and over the hills to the solitary dwellings, few and far between, that studded the wildest part of that most lovely, lonely, and picturesque part of Cornwall. The wondering was confined to no particular class

or sex ; everybody wondered—rich and poor, high and low—the clergyman, the doctor, the lawyer, the undertaker ; even the sexton and gravedigger leaned upon his spade and wondered if they would find him any work to do. Yet there was really no special cause for wonderment ; there was nothing remarkable in the mere fact of tenants being found to occupy a fine old house in the most romantic part of the country.

The Manor House had been vacant many years ; it was an old-fashioned, rambling sort of place, and had been in possession of the same family for centuries. Generation after generation had been born and lived and died there—then changes came. The old order of things gave place to the new, and as years rolled on the rising generation could not rest content with the lives of their forefathers ; they grew tired of its solitudes, they did not care to live among the bones

and memories of their ancestors, and one after another they drifted away, leaving the old house in the hands of the house-agent, and for some two or three years it had been the home of the bats and owls of the district.

It is true that visitors to Penzance, or tourists in the far away neighbourhood, would stop on their way to the Land's End and picnic in the surrounding wilderness ; they would stroll through the weedy garden, pummel the doors, and send the echoes rumbling through the deserted house, climb up and try to peep through the shuttered windows ; but before the day closed it was left to its own solitude. Occasionally people came to inspect the premises, but it seemed as though nobody would ever care to *live* there—it was too isolated, they said, too utterly apart from the rest of the world ; though, indeed, it was only about two miles from the village, but those miles were

through such rough, rugged roads, as to seem double the distance.

One bright morning news came to the village, and filtered through the neighbourhood, that the house was undergoing a sort of renovating process. Mr. Banks and a whole army of workmen were busily engaged there—their vans were seen crawling slowly through the highways and by-ways towards the house. Mr. Banks was besieged with questions, and curiosity was rife everywhere. No *avant-courrier* had brought accounts of the new-comers—they might have dropped down from heaven, or risen up out of the sea, for aught anybody knew about them. Mr. Banks could tell nothing—he knew nothing. He had received his instructions from the banking firm in London under whose orders he had always acted; he did not even know the name of the new tenants.

“But we shall soon find out all about

'em," he added ; " they're coming down to take possession next Thursday."

The nearest railway station—a mere shed of a place—was about five miles distant ; the trains were few and far between, and even then they often arrived without disgorging or receiving a single passenger. The solitary porter as a rule had nothing to do, and as for the individual called " station-master," his place was almost a sinecure. They might, and no doubt they did, sleep half their lives away in that drowsy little station ; but on this special Thursday morning they were wide awake and on the alert. They knew that something was going to happen, for telegraphic orders had been received that a fly should be in waiting for the midday train. Accordingly, the ramshackle vehicle was there an hour before its time, the lean grey horse solemnly swishing its tail, carrying on per-

petual warfare with the hungry flies who tried to make a meal off its mangy coat, while the driver lounged across and joined the expectant watchers on the platform, regaling them with such scraps of news as drifted through the stable yard. Presently the little train came curling round a gentle curve in the line, puffing and snorting softly as it rolled up to the platform. There was an unusually long stop ; engine-driver, stoker, and all looked round in some surprise to see what a large party was emptying itself upon the platform. They surged out of the compartments, laden with every conceivable kind of small baggage. The servants descended first ; there were eight in all, counting male and female domestics ; but to the trio standing by, it seemed as though a small army had taken possession of the platform. The guard released two large dogs from their imprison-

ment in the brake-van, and with their red tongues lolling out they ran barking and leaping along the platform. Hans, the groom, just managed to get them into a leash, but they strained and struggled to get free as they caught sight of their young mistress descending from a *coupé* in front of the train. She laid a hand softly on each great honest head.

“Quiet, Jerry! Bouncer, good dog!”

Her touch and the sound of her voice reduced them at once to quiet and obedience; their noisy excitement subsided into a quiet wagging of tails, and with their faithful eyes fixed upon her face they watched and waited. The lady was followed by a tall, gaunt old man, a large bony figure, with a slight stoop in the shoulders and a mass of snow-white hair; he was clean shaven, and a pair of brilliant dark eyes gleamed from beneath the thick

bushy brows. He glanced round with a keen, searching look, which seemed to take in everything at a single glance. He gave his arm to the young lady, and preceded by Chaplin, the station-master, they walked down the platform. Meanwhile the driver rushed to his vehicle, and began pummelling the cushions and bustling about the harness, now at the horse's head, then at the horse's tail, whistling, cracking his whip, and rushing round as though he were in a tremendous hurry, had all the world's work to do, and no time to do it in.

The servants were busy getting together the luggage; the solitary porter rushed wildly hither and thither, bewildered by the unusual array of boxes, hampers, etc. He felt as though he had been swooped upon by a regiment of unknown tongues. The new arrivals talked to one another in some foreign language, and when they

spoke to him it was in such broken, queerly accentuated English he could not understand a word they said. However, he shouldered such trunks as he could lay hands on, and packed the truck, piling one thing on the top of the other, sublimely indifferent to the clatter of voices round him, each one shrieking out directions at the same moment. Luckily he did not understand a word of them, and pitched the last box into the truck with a spiteful jerk, and a growl like muttered thunder came from between his lips.

“What’s them furrineering folk comin’ here for, I wonder? Don’t think much of ’em. Look here! that grinning monkey in the gray jacket give me this, after breaking my back hauling their beastly luggage about; if I’d known, I’d ha’ busted some of it!” He opened his hand and showed a battered sixpence.

“ Ah ! ” exclaimed Mr. Chaplin, “ that’s trusting your liberality to servants. Never mind, Ben, you shall go halves with me ; the old gentleman slipped half a sovereign into my hand for just opening my mouth and wishing him good morning. And they are not all foreigners, for the young lady, and a pretty creature she is too, thanked me in regular good English when I put her into the fly.”

“ That’s always the way,” grumbled Ben, though slightly mollified by the prospect of going halves. “ Them as does the most work gets the least pay ; it is always the way, from the Prince of Wales down’ards ; didn’t I help to win the battle of ‘ Tel Kebber,’ and what have I got for it ? A ruined liver and a smashed-up constitootion —that’s what I’ve got ! ”

I suppose that “ Ben ” had a surname, but nobody knew it, perhaps he did not know

it himself ; he was recognized by the simple name of "Ben," and any extension of that brief cognomen would have embarrassed him, indeed he would have resented it as an insult. A stranger, once wishing to propitiate him in behalf of a young bull-pup, addressed him respectfully as "Mr. ——. I didn't quite catch your name."

"No, nor you won't never catch it," he snarled in answer. "I'm 'Ben,' that's what I am. It's as good a name as I know on, and I don't want a better ; so as I look after that ill-looking brute o' your'n, you needn't bother about names."

He was evidently tetchy on the subject ; perhaps his name didn't fit him, and he had cast it off like a suit of old clothes, or perhaps it had got stained—not with blood at the battle of "Tel Kebber" that he was always talking about—but with something else, and he had trampled it in the mire

and left it behind him. He was not a native of Cornwall; soon after the campaign that "ruined his liver" had ended, he obtained the situation as porter at that lonely little station, and there he had remained ever since. Nobody knew anything of his antecedents, and he never talked of himself except in reference to "Tel Kebber," and then only in brief allusions.

He was a man who minded his own business—and other peoples too; he took an eager interest in Penally, and everybody for miles round it. Like most people who are always looking for "news" and prying into other people's affairs, he was remarkably reticent about his own, and though he never talked of himself, he talked freely of every one else, and knew all the "ins and outs" of life for miles round. He was deeply interested in the new occupants of

the old mansion, but hitherto his inquisitorial powers had been used in vain. He turned the battered sixpence over and over in his hand, and it set him thinking as if it had been a magic mirror, or talisman, which acted as a kind of touchstone and revealed the nature of those it came from; the less he knew the more he evolved from his imagination. When the luggage vans had arrived by train, he had crept about and around examining the furniture, peering into everything he could lay hands upon, but white marbles and carved oak were alike dumb—they told him nothing; he could gather no information therefrom; there was not even a label to tell whence they had come. In vain he twisted and wriggled about, spying into everything; curiosity was baffled at all points. Then he grew furious and resentful, and lashed himself into a belief that he was the

injured party, and that he and others were kept in the dark from malevolent motives.

“What did they mean by hiding themselves in mystery and leaving the natural curiosity of honest folk unsatisfied?”

How anxiously he had looked forward to their coming to-day! Now they had come and gone, and left nothing to tell even of their existence—but—a battered sixpence! Well, Ben lounged off to a shady corner to drone and dream away the hours till the next train was due, while the unconscious objects of his curiosity wound their way slowly towards their home that was to be. The servants in the waggonette drove on first, and drove at a rapid pace, as though they were anxious to get the first glimpse of the new domicile. Their keen eyes seemed to take in every feature of the land they were passing through, laughing and

chatting merrily, though in a language unknown to the driver, who inwardly cursed their "jabbering" as he called it, for he could not understand a word they said, and a driver naturally looks for a little pleasant gossip by the way, and considers himself rather ill-used if he doesn't get it. However, he took it out of the beasts he was driving, and lashed them on at a lively pace, till he deposited his merry freight at their destination.

Meanwhile the carriage containing the old gentleman and the young lady wound its way slowly through the grand old Cornish country; they looked out with evident pleasure and enjoyment on the beautiful scenery they were passing through. Now and again they got a magnificent view of the sea, and wherever they looked, whether landward or seaward, they found some beautiful, attractive feature; so varied too, it seemed as

though nature was indulging in a series of transformation scenes ; now it was grand in the extreme, huge rocky boulders, covered with moss or lichen, scattered around or grouped at the foot of weird old trees that had scarce green enough to cover their poor palsied branches—then in another few moments they were driving through a fairy dell, the soft, undulating land carpeted with tender green, and decorated with brilliant wild flowers and graceful ferns feathering the roadside ; only once or twice they passed a rude farmhouse, and the folk flashed out to see the unusual sight of life passing through their neighbourhood.

The girl sat with her hand in that of the old man, who regarded her with loving, anxious eyes. Jerry and Bouncer trotted demurely by the carriage side, now and then leaping up to look in at the window to assure themselves that all was right within.

The occupants talked little, contenting themselves with occasionally calling attention to some point of the scenery. They had just passed through a very wild, desolate way, when the coachman, pointing ahead, said—

“Yon’s the Manor House, sir.”

Looking forward, they beheld the old grey mansion in full view. Standing there alone, as it seemed, in a very wilderness, it looked a dreary, gruesome place enough ; it was a low, square building, with no attempt at architectural ornament of any kind ; with no quaint gables or picturesque columns or cupolas, or odd nooks and corners to attract or distract the eye. It stood there solitary, blank, and square, facing seawards, its strong stony sides bared to all the winds that blew. It was surrounded by a ragged unkempt garden, bounded by a low stone wall, separating the private grounds from

the wilds beyond. Although it had no fanciful features, it was a solemn, impressive place; its very simplicity and its age and isolation gave it a weird kind of charm.

“I did not think the place was quite such a solitude,” said the old man, taking in the entire view at one sweeping glance. “I’m afraid you’ll be very lonely here, Clarice.”

“Not at all,” answered Clarice, “we two shall be together, dad dear, always together—and at least I am safe here with you. You don’t think he will find us and try to take me away?”

“I would rather kill you with my own hands than let him have you,” said the old man, grimly; “I would, my child, I would.”

The girl smiled and seemed content.

The carriage drove through the Manor House gates and stopped at the massive oak door, which was flung wide open, and the hall within was filled with the servants

who had assembled there to welcome their young mistress to her new home. She was a great favourite with them all, from the highest to the lowest, for she had always a kind word and a pleasant smile for everybody. She paused before entering the house, and turned round upon the threshold to admire the magnificent view that spread before and around her. It was a magnificent blending together of sea and land, the coast line being clearly defined by the rugged, undulating sweep of the land. There were wide stretches of open country, wild and uncultivated; rough, rocky land, with tangles of grass and tall strong trees growing out of its stony heart; here and there were pretty villages or farmhouses, surrounded by soft, green meadows and fields of clover and orchards, their pink and white blossoms blooming out in the sunlit air.

Clarice stood shading her eyes from the sun's glare; and with glowing cheeks and lips half parted, drawing in the fresh sea breeze, and regarding the scene with evident satisfaction, she said—

“How can we ever be dull, with such a scene as this always before us? Why, it is full of life, dad dear—a real, pure life, better than the brawling world's life we have left behind us.”

The old man patted her hand softly, evidently well pleased at her contentment. Bouncer stood by her side wagging his tail slowly, occasionally giving a yelp of satisfaction, as though he shared her enjoyment and thoroughly understood her feelings. Jerry, who was altogether a dog of more commonplace character, had gone off on a foraging expedition, and to take a glimpse of the new premises on his own account.

The picture of age and youth as they

stood together in front of the old grey mansion was a pleasant one. The old man, Mr. Fleming—we may as well introduce him personally at once—was a notable looking man ; tall, thin, with a slight stoop in the shoulders, such as is apt to bow the figure of a man when he is over sixty, with a pale complexion, thick wavy snow-white hair, and dark eyes gleaming from beneath grizzled brows ; the natural expression of the face was full of benevolence and kindness, but circumstances somehow seemed to have “writ his life awry,” and turned the current of his feeling and the course of his actions into a more narrow and bitter channel than nature had intended they should flow in ; there was a restless, suspicious expression in his eyes, which sometimes contracted with a gloom that was almost savage in its intensity ; but none of this was visible now, there was

nothing but love and tenderness in his gaze as he regarded the fair girl beside him. She was fair, the very blondest of blondes, with a complexion that was milk-white in its dazzling fairness, with just a suspicion of a rose tint upon her cheeks; her rich, full lips were always half parted, which gave a peculiarly innocent expression to her face; her hair was of the purest gold, and grew low upon the forehead, not in a fuzz of curls and crinkles, but in natural wavy lines, parted in the middle, drawn back and gathered into a low knot behind—much as the beauty of a thousand years ago is represented in the lovely bust of “Clytie,” so familiar to our sight. Her blue eyes looked dreamily out from beneath the straight, level brows; but they were not always dreamy, sometimes a look came into them as though a world of tragedy was hidden therein, as though she had lived through

some terrible episode, or was to confront or become an actor in some great tragedy in the future — perhaps the premonitory symptoms were working in the air, manifesting themselves to the spiritual sight, while the mortal eyes were vainly trying to grasp and comprehend what was to come.

It was impossible to see this girl without being attracted by her, and wondering about her, and trying to gather somewhat of her history from her face ; but, whatever might lie in the past or await her in the future, the present, in this lovely lonely corner of the world, seemed to open out only a prospect of peace ; it seemed impossible that tragedy should reach forth its hand and touch her here.

CHAPTER II.

THEIR FIRST APPEARANCE.

DAYS passed on, and the inmates of the Manor House remained shrouded in mystery—or so it appeared to the curious eyes and tongues of Penally. Once or twice the family had been seen driving through the village, and an old fisherman had met them strolling along the beach in the gloaming, had exchanged “good evenings,” and that was all! The usual tradespeople called at the house daily for orders, which were always given in writing, and with a liberal exchange of smiles, and a volley of uncomprehended words; but as

neither party understood the language of the other, there was no harm done. No gossip from the kitchen told the doings in the parlour, and no gleams of the family history wandered out into the world beyond.

An old lame fishwife was the only person who had penetrated into the house. The young mistress had seen her toiling up the hill, and had desired her to go into the kitchen and rest awhile. She had come to her there, and talked to her, and asked her about the poor folk, their doings and their needs; and had listened with patient sympathy to the poor soul's story of the hardships the fishermen had to endure on stormy nights at sea; and then how often they came home with empty nets, sails torn, and craft crippled, barely reaching the land with their lives; and while they worked to repair the damage, but for the help of neighbours almost as poor as themselves,

must have starved outright. "An' her kind words warmed my heart better 'n the meat and drink she gave me," said the old woman, as she related her experiences to a group of fishermen and women, who, as she came down the beach, left off mending their boats and nets, and surrounded her, eager for the news. Some of the old men were gaunt and grim, their faces scarred with half a century's battle with the wild tempestuous sea; the younger men, already bronzed with rough weather, were stalwart and strong—young sea-dogs, soaked through and through with the salt sea brine. All alike gathered round, as eager to hear the news as though the doings and mystery of the Manor House concerned them in their hardworking life at all! But people who have little excitement in their own lives—no matter whether they be high or low—take the keenest interest in that of their neighbours. It was

astonishing how much the old woman found to say of that one brief interview—interlarding the facts with scraps from her own imagination, telling not only what she saw and heard, but what she thought and fancied! They followed her with a running fire of remarks and interrogations, and having discussed the subject in all its bearings, and considered it gravely, they decided that no matter where the new gentry at the Manor House came from, and no matter whether they were foreigners or not, so long as they had consideration for, and sympathy with, the poor, they were as good as the best Christians about Penally; wiser heads than theirs might have come to no better conclusion.

The rectory and church of Penally was some little distance from the village, and also from the Manor House. Of course it was expected that the Rector, the Rev.

Joseph Spencer, would be among the first to call on his new parishioners ; it was clearly his duty to do so from courtesy, as well as regarding the matter from a religious point of view, for of whatever denomination of Christians they might be, they would naturally expect the recognition of the rector of the parish, and if they did not approve of his creed, would at least appreciate his courtesy.

The Rev. Joseph Spencer was a mild, mousy-looking man, with a slow gliding motion, and a low, soft voice, that had something of the purring quality of the pussy-cat in it. His countenance expressed nothing in particular ; it was generally, when in society, clothed in smiles, and wore an amiable air of self-satisfaction. Some people say the face is an index to the mind ; it may be so, but it is an index that requires a great deal of correction before it can be admitted in

the current edition of human nature. Taking the Rev. Joseph Spencer's face as an index to his mind, you would have said there was nothing in it which would be a mistake, for he had a great deal of mind ; it might not be of the finest quality, but there was plenty of it, such as it was. He had a profound respect for his calling, combined with a strong sense of his own responsibility, which was sometimes too much for him ; he felt that the salvation of the whole parish depended upon his single exertions, and to a conscientious man this was a very trying position.

Most of the neighbouring clergymen contented themselves with minding their own business, and leaving their parishioners alone, except when they could be of use to them, then they were always to the fore, comforting the sick and sorrowful with kind words and cheering promises,

showing the miserable how to get out of the slough of despond into the clean way again, helping the helpless to help themselves—which is, perhaps, the hardest task of all—leading and guiding their flocks in the right direction; but Mr. Spencer did not approve of what he called “a weak, namby-pamby way of doing things.” He went vigorously to work, and did his duty to his own satisfaction at least, if not always to other people’s. He hunted up the sins of his parishioners as though he loved them; he pursued them with lash and scourge, and hurled such fierce denunciations on the heads of the poor sinners, that they fled at the sound of his soft, persistent voice, and hid their sins out of sight, while he gloried in his achievement, and fancied he had slain the sin, whereas he had only tempted the sinner to add hypocrisy to the rest of his vices. Well, he was

sincere in his way, and believed in the wisdom of his own proceedings, both as a magistrate and as a clergyman; for he was Justice of the Peace for the county, and was noted for the strict, stern justice he meted out to all wrong-doers, from a petty delinquent to the hardened criminal, they all knew the harshest sentence the law allowed would be given to them by the mild-mannered Rector. His was strict justice, untempered by mercy or consideration of circumstances surrounding the culprit—no “extenuating circumstances” were admitted into his code of administration. He was proud of the evenhanded way in which he held the scales of justice—no hair’s-breadth of favour on either side; and with something of the old Spartan spirit he used to boast that if his own flesh and blood were brought before him in criminal guise, he would pronounce sentence as upon

a stranger. God help him should that day of trial ever come !

His wife, Mrs. Spencer, was a most worthy helpmeet to her lord, his very counterpart in petticoats. She was a small, shrivelled, wiry little woman, with the small black eyes and thin sharp features which invariably indicate the shrew, and she was rich in all shrewish virtues—a fact fully realised by those who were unfortunately drafted into her service. Still, she was what is called a thoroughly good woman—she kept the ten commandments, as respectable, well-regulated sinners generally do ; she never outraged propriety, and the high, rigidly moral tone of her mind was a thing unquestioned ; in fact, she had so many principles crowded into a small space none of them had room to grow or bear any pleasant fruit ; one principle reacted so strongly upon another that they became a

tangled mass, dwarfed and stunted, whence no generous or kindly thing could be extricated. She had no sympathy with bodily suffering or mental tribulation, and generally comforted the afflicted by trying to assure them that their troubles were their own fault, and they "ought to bear up." Her really sterling good qualities were marred by their hard casing; but, nevertheless, she was a good woman, detestably good! a few feminine follies, a touch of tenderness, a gleam of kindness, might have won affectionate regard; many worse women are dearly loved, she was only tolerated. However, she was a helpmate to her husband; each believed in the other's perfection, so the world had nothing to say in the matter.

This notable pair had a son and a daughter, each being an improvement on the parent stock, so far as can be at present judged, for they are still young, and

the germs of good or evil within their natures have yet to develop and bear poison, fruit, or flowers — who can tell which? Hugh was a fine, lithe young fellow, of about four-and-twenty, and was keeping his last term at Oxford. He was brimming over with health and high spirits; he was a smart oarsman, a crack shot, a graceful and fearless rider; in fact, he was thoroughly accomplished in all athletic sports and manly exercises; wherever manly strength, courage, or endurance, was called into action, he stood always in the first rank. His intellectual capacities were perhaps limited, certainly their development was slow, and by no means to the satisfaction of his superiors; he was most popular with his fellows, but to his college, which had turned out some of the most prominent men of the day, he was no credit at all.

The daughter, Miriam, was some years younger. She was taller, fairer, handsomer than her mother, with light brown wavy hair, and large blue eyes like painted china, and almost as dull and expressionless. Her character was in a crude state of formation, though it was naturally warped and narrowed by home influences. Whether those pale eyes would ever glow with passion or melt with tenderness were speculations that only the future could decide.

Just about the time when the Manor House was taken possession of by the new arrivals Hugh Spencer happened to be at home for a brief vacation, and of course was stirred by the current of curiosity that was working round them, though it did not take possession of him so strongly as it did of some others. He listened to the clatter of tongues about him, and merely uttered his own wonderment in brief lazy phrases which were forgotten as soon as uttered.

Sunday morning came, and everybody wondered whether the new-comers would make their appearance at church; a great deal of neighbourly feeling depended upon that. The Rector had not yet had an opportunity of paying his respects to them, but intended doing so the following week. Meanwhile the church bells rang out on the still morning air, echoing over the hills and through the valleys with a sweet solemn sound such as only the Sabbath bells have power to awaken. That part of the country, as I have said before, was sparsely populated, but the scattered population came from far and near, and gathered together at the parish church as was their duty on the Sabbath morning. Some sauntered through the quaint little churchyard, stopping here and there at the grave of some friend or kindred, perhaps laying a bunch of bright flowers on the green sod, a

token of remembrance to those who lay beneath, whose feet had once trodden those well-worn paths as they listened to the self-same sounds—deaf now—deaf to the music of the church bells for evermore.

Many glances were cast along the winding high-road through which the gentry from the Manor House would come to the church, if they came at all; but there was no signs of them. The bells ceased, the last few stragglers entered the low arched doorway, but scarcely had the congregation settled down to its customary devotions, when the doors opened and let in a stream of sunlight as the family from the Manor House entered. It had increased now to a party of three; for in addition to the grand, white-headed old man and the young girl, there came in a tall, broad-shouldered, good-looking young man, with a smooth brown beard and brown eyes, and altogether of a

distinguished appearance ; and as his hand rested on the pew door, those who observed it could not help thinking what a strong, white, shapely hand it was. I am afraid that the new-comers interfered somewhat with the devotional spirit of the people ; furtive glances were cast towards them, and a sort of mental arithmetic, a general summing up of their appearance and of their possible characters, ran through the minds of the worshippers.

The inhabitants of the Rector's pew, however, with one exception, kept in solemn position. Mrs. Spencer would as soon have thought of cutting her head off as of turning it in the wrong direction during the service. Her daughter, Miriam, as usual followed her mother's example ; but the refractory Hugh faced boldly round, swept the whole party with one swift glance, then settled his attention on Clarice, thinking, or rather feeling,

that his eyes had never beheld a face so divinely fair ; fair, not as to complexion only, but in the broadest acceptation of the word. In vain he tried to turn his eyes away, some mesmeric influence seemed to draw them to her face against his will, for he felt it was rude to stare so persistently at the beautiful stranger, but he could not help it ; even when he tore his eyes away and tried to fix his attention on his father's sermon, her face shadowed itself in the air and floated before him. He strained his ears to catch the sound of her voice as she uttered the responses, but it was lost in the hearty sonorous responses of the older man, and swallowed up in the volume of voices round them.

Presently the anthem began. The congregation was musical, and it seemed as though every man, woman, and child uplifted their voices and sang their hardest,

whether in time or out of time it was a matter of supreme indifference. In church everybody thinks they have a right to sing, whether they have the qualification for it or not; they love the sound of their own voices, and take every opportunity of gratifying their taste, heedless of the torture they inflict on their more cultivated fellow creatures, but mere lip service is nothing in the sight of God. He accepts the incense rising from the pure heart, no matter how tuneless the utterance, so that it is in His honour and glory; the rude voice of the peasant is as welcome to His ears as the rich tones of the *prima donna*. What was wanting in music the present congregation made up in noise. Mr. Spencer was not sensitive upon the subject; he liked this kind of demonstration, and encouraged his flock to uplift to His glory such voices as God had given them.

Gradually into the discordant roar of voices there crept a sweet melodious sound ; low at first, then swelling and rising till it impregnated the air with its own sweet music. One by one the harsher voices hushed, every man looked at his neighbour and listened and wondered whence came that unusual and delicious sound. Such a thing had never happened in Penally Church ! Hitherto they had had things all to themselves ; they hardly knew whether to resent this strange phenomenon as an intrusion or welcome it as an invisible grace sent straight from heaven ! Some ceased singing altogether, some few shut their eyes, opened their mouths, and roared louder than before, as though trying to drown the sweetness in their own muddy strain.

Hugh Spencer listened with bated breath ; he seemed to hear with his heart rather than

with his ears, for he was deaf to all sounds save that one sweet woman's voice. The anthem ceased, the congregation sank down on its knees to pray, but Hugh remained standing in a listening, waiting attitude—apparently lost and absorbed by one thought; but a violent tug at his coat-tail recalled him to himself. He glared round just in time to catch a stern rebuke from the corner of his mother's eye as she dropped her head into her prayer book, and, with anything but devotion in his thoughts, he took his place beside her.

Mr. Spencer never gave long sermons, they were generally of about twenty minutes' duration. He was sensible enough to know that he could not fix the attention of his hearers for a longer period, even if he were himself inclined to extend his discourse; after all, a great deal may be said in twenty minutes. In that brief space a brisk orator

will awaken the religious fervour of his flock and lash them into a state of pious extasy, while a mere commonplace preacher may drone for an hour without stirring a single pulse of his hearers. Twenty minutes is quite long enough to listen to the monotonous voice of any one man; at the end of that time the very sameness of the sound is apt to send the congregation to sleep, and Mr. Spencer would not run the risk of tempting them to sin in that direction, therefore his discourse was always brief. On the present occasion it was even briefer than usual, but to Hugh it seemed endless. However, the service was over at last. Now, as a rule, Hugh was most punctilious in his attentions to his womankind, but on this occasion he forgot everything; he was animated only by one wild impulse to rush after the Manor House family, with what object he hardly knew, he had not had time

to think. As he was about to follow his impulse, his mother laid a detaining hand upon him, and a decorous crowd moved slowly between him and the door, and though inwardly chafing in spirit, he was obliged to walk with equal decorum by her side down the aisle. Once outside the church he gazed eagerly round, but was only just in time to see the trio turn into the narrow winding lane on their way home to the Manor House. So they had walked to church, that was evident, and a good many pair of eyes followed them wonderingly.

They had come like shadows, and departed without a word or even exchanging a single salutation with any one about the place. Mr. Laurence, who for the last thirty years had done all the "law" for the scattered population of Penally, came briskly out of church and joined the Spencer party before they had left the churchyard. After ex-

changing the usual commonplace salutation with the ladies, he tapped Hugh on the shoulder, jerked his head in the direction of the departed attractions, and said :

“I called there yesterday ; come along, and I’ll tell you all about them.” With an unusual stretch of generosity, Mrs. Spencer invited him home to the Rectory to lunch.

CHAPTER III.

“ SPENCER-ONIA.”

THE Rectory table was never very liberally supplied, strict economy being one of the virtues Mrs. Spencer rigidly practised. She could not outgrow with better circumstances the enforced economy of her early days, when her husband was a poor, a very poor man, and bone-scraping and cheese-paring were the engrossing occupations of her daily life. Circumstances had improved, they stood now on the topmost branch of the clerical tree, had a firm footing in the world, and a handsome income to prevent

them from falling ; but the penurious spirit followed her through all her days, and kept her in a continual state of warfare with the rest of her household, for Mr. Spencer liked a good dinner, and sometimes stood upon his dignity, and insisted upon having it. But domestic warfare is a wearying, spirit-breaking thing, and to a man who has other important occupations it is almost impossible it can be carried on at all successfully. It is easier to give way than to live in a constant state of revolt against the powers that be. Not that Mrs. Spencer was allowed to carry on her economical operations in undisturbed peace of mind by any means. She occasionally quailed beneath the marital storm provoked by the exercise of her cherished virtue ; and then her son Hugh's healthy appetite was the bugbear of her life. He *would* be fed, and if the legitimate supplies

fell short, would stroll leisurely out and twist the neck of the fattest fowl on the premises, and broil it for his own special delectation.

It was no use attempting to parry the attacks of Hugh's hunger, so in some sort of compensation for her sufferings thereby she put her household on the shortest of short commons; and when a rebellion arose against the shortness and the quality of the provisions the stir reached the Rector's ears. He had the household put upon board-wages forthwith; so the lady's operations were thenceforth confined to the parlour, and there, to a certain extent, the Rector could keep an eye upon things himself.

"I don't so much mind being starved when we are alone," he had once said, in grim satire to his better half; "but I will not be disgraced in the presence of my friends, or in the sight of my parish." And

for a time things had gone better, though the lady herself did not quite approve of the arrangement, as it took a certain amount of power out of her hands. She loved to overlook the larder and superintend the voracious appetites of her servants, parcelling out the scraps of cold meat, etc.; for woe betide those who dared to appropriate a scrap without her permission, and any suggestion as to the unfitness of the food for human digestion was answered by a homily upon the wicked sin of daintiness.

Her hospitable invitation to Mr. Laurence took the whole family by surprise, as their Sunday meal generally consisted of bread-and-butter, with perhaps a single chop for the hungry Hugh; but on this special Sunday they did not know but that she might have made magnificent preparations, with a shadowy notion lurking in the background of her mind of establishing friendly relations

with the Manor House family by inviting them home to luncheon should they give her an opportunity of doing so ; but that opportunity failing, she had forced her hospitable spirit to embrace Mr. Laurence. Hence they followed her lead in trustful mood.

The dining-room was a large, handsome apartment, sweet with the scent of spring flowers, while an invigorating fragrance from the sea came in at the open window. The table was laid with the whitest of white napery, and an abundance of shining silver and glass, and a profusion of primroses scattered about everywhere. So far all promised well. There were two dishes, one at each end of the table, their bright covers evidently hiding something hot and tempting. The cold refreshments were scantily provided ; a few broken sardines lurked ignominiously in a tiny ocean of rancid oil, and a couple of hard-boiled eggs, cut in half,

reposed upon a parsley bed ; a large loaf, and a few small nuts of butter completed the cold refreshments for the meal. Grace was said, and with a great flourish the covers were removed, and disclosed upon the dish before the master of the house a savory stew—a very savory, if not a very tempting stew ; it had almost walked out of the larder the day before—its progress had only been arrested by a bath of vinegar, a plentiful shower of pepper, salt, and a disguise of ketchup and other tasty condiments, which, after some mysterious culinary operations, fitted it to masquerade upon the table as a delicious something *à la jardinière*. But the disguise was too thin ; the suspicious character of the original mess revealed itself—the cover was replaced. With a thundercloud upon his brow, but a ghost of a smile upon his lips, Mr. Spencer said, in the oiliest of accents :

“What have you there, Jemima?”

“A little devilled chicken, dear,” she answered blandly, as a couple of bare drumsticks, artistically arranged on either side of the breastbone, and profusely decorated with watercress and parsley, were revealed to view. “May I send you some, Mr. Laurence?” she added, sweetly.

“Pray help your daughter first,” he answered. “Unless I have something here to tempt you?” he added, turning to Miss Spencer.

“Thanks,” she answered. “I take only bread-and-butter in the middle of the day.”

“That is exactly my case,” rejoined Mr. Laurence, who was perfectly well aware of the peculiarities of the mistress of the house, and when he accepted her invitation to lunch did so under no delusion whatever. “With a good breakfast and a good dinner,

a mere crust and a glass of wine is the proper thing for the midday snack.”

“For all those who consider their health, it is certainly the most correct arrangement,” replied the lady, graciously. “Hugh, my dear boy, what are you taking?”

“There doesn’t seem much for the ‘dear boy’ to take,” said the Rector, brusquely. “Have up the cold joint. I like a *pièce de résistance*, where one can cut and come again,” he added smilingly to his visitor.

“You know we *never* have large joints, Joseph,” said the lady, severely. “Hugh, dear, do taste this *fricandeau*.” Hugh wisely refused. “But you used to like French cookery,” she urged, “and this is done after a very famous receipt.”

“Thanks, my dear mother,” he answered ; “but I don’t care for French cookery *à la Spenceroni*. Nature did not build me on the same ethereal principles as the rest of

my family," he added to Mr. Laurence. "I go in for three good square meals a day."

"You are not carrying out that principle now," observed Mr. Laurence, seeing he touched nothing, not even bread-and-butter."

"But I shall presently. Look in at Radcliffe's in about an hour, and you'll find me seated before a broad sirloin; you'll see then how I get along," said Hugh, paying the smile of satisfaction in advance.

"People preach a crusade against over-drinking," smiled Mrs. Spencer; "but nobody has a word to say about over-eating, and I think gluttony is as great a vice as drunkenness."

"So it is, my dear Jemima," replied Mr. Spencer; "but at least you have the satisfaction of knowing that you do your best to put that vice down."

Of course they could not discuss their

neighbours in the presence of the servants ; but as soon as the meagre meal was over, and the door closed on the domestics, they moved to the attack.

"Now, Mr. Laurence," said Mrs. Spencer, settling down for a nice dish of gossip, "you say you've called at the Manor House. We have not had an opportunity of doing so yet, though I certainly think the first call should have been from the church ; but tell us, who did you see ? what did they talk about ? and how do they seem to like Cornwall ? "

"My dear mother, they have not been here long enough to know much about the place," said Hugh.

"And certainly they can know nothing about the people, for they have seen nobody," observed the Rector.

"I think they are very uncommon and queer-looking," said Miriam.

“Queer! not at all—uncommon! very,” rejoined Hugh, sharply. “It is not often you see that kind of thing down in this desolate hole; they are a cut above the general breed altogether.”

“That is a slangy way of talking, Hugh,” rejoined Mrs. Spencer, deprecatingly; “and I don’t know that it is quite correct. They are certainly very odd-looking—not that I object to them on *that* score.”

“That’s lucky,” replied Hugh, “especially as you can’t alter or cut them down to your own pattern.”

“Taking them altogether, I think them rather attractive,” added Mrs. Spencer, finishing her sentence, entirely ignoring her son’s interruption.

“Rather,” echoed Hugh, emphatically. “And decidedly good Christians, or they wouldn’t have walked three miles to hear the governor preach.”

"The old gentleman is a very dignified, fine-looking man," said Mrs. Spencer.

"And the girl, I suppose, would be called pretty," said Miriam, hesitating, as though for her part she rather doubted it.

"Pretty!" echoed Hugh; "she's the very loveliest girl I have ever seen, more like an angel than a woman."

"You can't say much for her modesty, anyhow," rejoined his sister. "I never heard any one sing out in the way she did this morning, especially a stranger in a strange church, and in my opinion——"

"And I dare say 'your opinion' will be of supreme importance to them when they come to know it," said Hugh, almost savagely, for the general family tone irritated him.

"Well," exclaimed the Rector, "you have asked Mr. Laurence half a dozen questions and haven't given him a chance to answer *one*."

“ We all beg his pardon,” laughed Hugh ;
“ but you know, my dear sir, women are like horses, and when they get the bit in their mouths they are off at a tangent.”

“ At any rate you laid no hand upon the bridle rein, but rather helped the runaways,” rejoined Mr. Laurence, who was deliberate in his manner and movements, and had waited in patience to put in his word.

“ Well, we’ve come to a stand-still now, so fire away and tell us all you know about them,” said Hugh.

“ We called there, Mrs. Laurence and I, yesterday, and saw the whole family at home.”

“ The old gentleman, and his son and daughter ? ” suggested Mrs. Spencer, anxious for every detail.

“ Well, that does not turn out to be the relationship,” he answered.

“ Surely the young people are brother and sister ? ” inquired Miriam.

“No.”

Horrible idea ! “ Surely *not* husband and wife ! ” exclaimed Hugh.

“ Not that either. The old gentleman first introduced me to the young lady, saying, ‘ My daughter Clarice ; ’ then to his nephew, Mr. Swayne. When I afterwards, in the course of conversation, addressed the young lady as Miss Fleming, he smiled and corrected me, saying, ‘ She is my step-daughter ; her name is Lemaire.’ So you see the family is composed of Mr. Fleming, his nephew, and step-daughter.”

“ And does that fellow, the nephew, stay here always ? ” inquired Hugh.

“ My dear boy, I could not presume to ask such a question.”

“ And do they seem to be nice pleasant kind of people, and inclined to be sociable ? ” asked Mrs. Spencer.

“ I don’t know about being sociable

exactly," returned Mr. Laurence, "but they are certainly a most charming, interesting family, very cultivated and agreeable, but I should say might be a little exclusive."

"Of course that is quite right and natural," exclaimed Mrs. Spencer; "one couldn't expect people of their kind to know everybody."

"And as everybody lives half a dozen miles from everybody else, there is no necessity that they should," rejoined Hugh.

"Unfortunately *I*, as the Rector's wife, am forced into intimacies with people whom, under other circumstances, I should not know."

"You are in your proper sphere, my dear Jemima," said the Rector, taking her words as an insinuation against her position, against himself. "You have here exactly the kind of position you ought to value—

among the poor, the humble, and the ignorant, to whom it is your blessed privilege to be not only a spiritual light, but a moral guide."

"It is all very well talking, Joseph," replied the lady, "but suppose people *won't* be guided, and the more light you show the farther they wander away into the darkness! We've been here ten years, as you know, Mr. Laurence, and devoted ourselves to the parish, and in spite of our labours people are worse now than they were when we first came among them, and there's more vice, more drunkenness, more poaching; and I'm sure I'm always rating the women, warning them of the terrible punishment which awaits them in the next world, and the Rector never misses a chance of sending a man to jail!" she added, viciously.

"The manufacturing of jail-birds made easy," exclaimed Hugh. "People take

human nature at the wrong end, and then wonder they can't get it right."

"Wrong end—what do you mean?" snapped his mother. "What can one do more than punish the sinful?"

"Ah, that's just it," returned Hugh; "if you punished less, perhaps there would be more satisfaction on both sides. Remember the old gentleman who gave the thief a pair of silver candlesticks, and turned him into an honest man and a good Christian for ever afterwards!"

"That is an upside down way of doing business, which I don't at all approve," said Mrs. Spencer, severely. "I call that downright encouragement of vice—it is our duty to labour for the suppression of it."

"But, my dear mother, your labour by your own account only seems to increase it," he rejoined. "Suppose you go on another tack, and instead of talking so much

about the next world try to make the poor folk jollier, and in this you'll find things go easier all round. What's the use of preaching to a set of poor, ill-fed, hard-worked people? give 'em a good meal, I say—fill their bodies, and then pitch into their souls, and preach and pray as hard as you like—a fellow can't be pious on an empty stomach."

"You have a very coarse, commonplace way of putting things, Hugh," said Mrs. Spencer, with an air of deep disgust. "I regard matters through a larger view of spiritual light."

"Well, you have a wide field here for spiritual gymnastics, but you don't seem to make much of it, somehow."

While they were talking, the Rector had passed into his study, resolved to receive no information second hand, but to see and judge of his parishioners for himself; Miriam had been having a quiet chat aside with Mr.

Laurence, and now broke in upon the conversation, saying—"You've wandered away from the Manor House again, and *I've* got all the news. Mr. Laurence thinks there is something wrong about Miss Lemaire."

"Not wrong," exclaimed Mr. Laurence, hastily, "only something a little strange. Mr. Fleming seems to watch over her with rather more than common parental care. I fancy it is for her sake he has sought sea-air and a mild climate."

"Judging from a mere cursory glance I should say she was decidedly delicate, and if they are really in search of health" (Mrs. Spencer emphasized the "really" as if she doubted it), "I know of no place where they are so likely to find it as at Penally; but there is so much mystery about them, one can't help being a little anxious, perhaps a little suspicious. One naturally likes to know something about one's neighbours."

"Oh, bother!" replied the irritated Hugh. "Why can't you let your neighbours alone? What does it matter to you where they have come from, or why they have come. If you find them nice pleasant people, is not that enough?"

"No, Hugh, it certainly is not enough," said his mother, emphatically. "The worst people are sometimes the most pleasant. There's so much deceit, hypocrisy, and wickedness in the world. They may be Fenians, conspirators, flying from justice; or criminals or bankrupts, or—or—indeed it is impossible to say what they might not be."

"Except," exclaimed Mr. Laurence, with a quiet twinkle in his eye, for he knew the lady well, "that the kind of people you mention don't travel in such a style, and with such evidence of wealth as our new neighbours do."

“Ah, well! when people try to hide what they really are, it is no wonder they should be taken for what they are not,” rejoined Mrs. Spencer, sharply.

“If you *lived* at Penally, Hugh, instead of paying us a flying visit now and then, you would quite understand how horribly dull we should be if we could not speculate about our neighbours,” said Miriam, in rather an injured tone.

“Besides,” added Mrs. Spencer, “it is our duty as common Christians to take a human interest in our neighbours.”

“But when the ‘human interest’ dwindles down to a gossiping groove, as it generally does with women,” said Hugh, full of spiteful speculations and slanderous insinuations, “it would perhaps be as well, and more Christianlike, if you let the ‘human interest’ alone.”

“How severe you are,” said Mrs. Spencer,

mildly; "quite out of temper it seems, and on the Sabbath day too!"

Miriam laughed.

"I think Miss Lemaire is answerable for Hugh's ill-temper! He seems to have fallen a victim at first sight."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Hugh, as he strode out of the room, and after a few minutes' desultory chat Mr. Laurence followed him.

"We haven't heard much from Mr. Laurence, mother," said Miriam.

"No, my dear," returned Mrs. Spencer; "he says little, but he may know a great deal more than he chooses to tell us—besides he's a lawyer, and likes to keep things close. We'll go over to the Manor House to-morrow. I've a keen scent, and if I smell a rat, I'll soon have it out of its hole, tail and all; but come, my dear, we shall be late for afternoon service, and we should not let worldly matters interfere with our religious duties."

CHAPTER IV.

MAKING ACQUAINTANCE.

HUGH SPENCER was up betimes in the morning, and, with his gun flung over his shoulder, started for a little harmless sport among the sea-gulls or anything else that came in his way during his desultory ramble among the crags and cliffs that made so picturesque the neighbourhood of Penally. As he crossed the orchard he met Miriam returning from the farmyard with a basket of new-laid eggs, for she had sole charge of the poultry, and kept the hens strictly to their duty, and if

they refused to lay, or conducted themselves in any eccentric or wandering fashion, they had their necks wrung and were speedily made an end of. On seeing her brother equipped for a day's outing, she exclaimed in surprise—

“Well, you might let the sea-gulls rest for a day. I know mother expects you to go with us to the Manor House this afternoon.”

“Well, you know I don't particularly care about paying morning calls,” he answered, “especially with women.”

“We thought you'd be glad of the chance of making the acquaintance of your fair St. Cecilia.”

“But I shall choose a chance of my own making,” he answered; “no stereotyped introductions in that quarter for me.”

“If they turn out satisfactory and we like them,” rejoined his sister, senten-

tiously, "we mean to ask them to dinner, and get a few of our neighbours to meet them."

"For heaven's sake don't do that, or I shall turn tail and run!" exclaimed Hugh, who had a wholesome horror of the dreary festivities that characterized the Rectory dinner parties. "Let them have breathing time before we afflict them with that style of entertainment."

"You always complain of its being so dull at Penally," rejoined his sister, reproachfully, "and yet, whenever we try to make things lively, you get cross and dissatisfied."

"Because you have such dismal ideas of liveliness," he answered. "Now, a picnic at the Land's End would be the sort of initiatory festivity that I should like."

"And so should I," responded Miriam, with unaccustomed liveliness. "I'll speak to mamma about it, and talk it over as

we go along. I think it's a capital idea, Hugh."

"You must look sharp about it, you know," he rejoined, "for I shall be going back to Cambridge in a week; at least, that's what I ought to do," he added, correcting himself. "*Au revoir!* I say, Miriam," he continued, jerking his head in the direction of the Manor House; "try and make a fair impression over there; you don't have such a chance every day."

"Oh! of course," answered Miriam, who had an exalted idea of her own importance, as most commonplace people have; "and if I find the girl nice, I dare say I shall pick her up and get intimate with her, for a time at least."

"I'm off—so don't expect me till you see me," said Hugh, interrupting her with some impatience; the family tone calmly adopted by Miriam irritated and jarred

upon his nerves; the idea of that divinity being "picked up" by a piece of common clay struck him as a kind of profanity to which he could make no reply.

It was one of those sweet silent spring mornings when everything seems watching and waiting for the birth of the bright summer time with its trailing troops of fruits and flowers. The fresh, invigorating air seemed to come down straight from heaven laden with a thousand subtle perfumes, which gave new zest to the life of man, as to the life of the woods, fields, and flowers. Light of heart and light of limb, a fine specimen of a stalwart young Englishman, Hugh Spencer sauntered on his way, his gun flung over his shoulder, and a white wiry terrier at his heels, with a brown patch over one eye and a long, uncompromising tail; a scaramouch of a dog, a pariah and an outcast from his

nobler tribe, but the very apple of his master's eye.

Hugh had rescued him from a violent death in his early days of puppyhood, and in acknowledgment of this obligation the dog rewarded his master with the most devoted and profound affection that the canine mind is capable of feeling; but, as though to counterbalance his devotion to the one human being, he seemed to have a sworn enmity to every other; he neither loved nor obeyed anybody except his master; he hunted everything that was huntable, from a cat upwards and downwards, and if he could only get a surreptitious snap at anybody's heels, he "went for him there and then"; but a word or look from his master was always enough to control his high spirits and quell the spirit of mischief within him.

This amiable beast revelled in the name

of "Crib," being named after the celebrated prize-fighter, whose proclivities he largely inherited, for a fight—a good rollicking fight—was a thing he most delighted in; no matter if his opponent were as big as a donkey, Crib was always ready for the attack, and sprang to it on the slightest provocation, or on no provocation at all; he indulged his pugnacious spirit merely by way of exercise, and though he bore upon him the scars of many a battle, his fiery spirit was still unquenched. Close upon his master's heels followed the evil-minded Crib, looking hypocritically meek and amiable, wagging his tail in a slow, harmless fashion, as though not a spark of mischief lingered therein. The sea-gulls were allowed to have a good time, unmolested by Hugh's gun; he seemed to have forgotten the use of it. Whistling softly to himself, he sauntered on, allowing

his feet to carry him whither they would, apparently exercising no control over them. Now and then he addressed a few words to his fourfooted companion ; it was his habit to consult Crib whenever he was perplexed in mind, or in any way troubled or doubtful as to any particular course of conduct. Crib listened with his intelligent eyes fixed upon his master's face, looking wise as though he were taking it all into his moral digester, and after due meditation answered with an approving bark and gravely undulating tail—always to the satisfaction of his master, who translated it according to his own desire.

“All right,” Hugh would answer ; “I knew you would agree with me. Ah ! if you could only talk, what an invaluable friend you would be, old Crib ! ”

Through the woods, under the shade of the beautiful green trees, with the sunlight

glinting through, Hugh wandered in sweet contentment, with the sunshine in his heart and snatches of old songs falling from his lips, keeping time with the songs of the birds overhead. Emerging at length out of the shadowy woods on to the broken ground, still onwards he strolled seaward, and soon reached the rugged grey cliffs. Here he paused and looked out upon the open sea. The sun poured down his full measure of light, and flooded the land and sea with golden glory, shining everywhere alike, leaving no corner of the earth unvisited, sending a narrow tremulous pathway of dancing light across the sea, over which the thoughts might wander at will, away up to the heavens, till they were lost in the infinite, or swallowed up in the mists of the distant horizon. A rough winding pathway led down from the cliffs to the sea-shore. The Manor House,

with its tall chimneys just visible through the wilderness of green, lay about half a mile ahead of where he stood.

Hugh persuaded himself that he was surprised to find himself so near the home of the divinity that filled his thoughts. He glanced round for a moment as though in doubt as to which road to take; he did not believe he had intentionally wandered in that direction, of course not; it was mere chance—if there is such a thing as chance—which many wise folk learn to doubt; then he consulted Crib upon the subject.

“Well, Crib, old fellow, which way shall we go, eh? Come, you shall decide by a wag of your tail.” But Crib’s tail wagged so frantically, and he commenced such a series of leaps and excited barks, that you could make no sense out of him at all. Failing to make himself understood by this proceeding, he stood still for a moment,

regarding things with a meditative air ; then, with ears erect and straightened tail, darted down the cliff path.

“ So that is the way, is it, old fellow ? Well you’re as good a guide as blind old Fate anyway,” said Hugh to himself as he slowly sauntered after the dog. His eye wandered listlessly over the wide expanse of living waters ; the curling waves ran joyously along the edge of the land, their white foam lips kissing the shore, with low musical murmuring as though they loved it. Oh ! the cruel, treacherous sea ! so wooing, calm, and fair it seems ! yet in a few short hours those tiny wavelets may swell and merge into thundering billows rising mountains high, hugging the big ship to death in their strong embrace, or crushing it like an egg-shell on the rock-bound shore ! But now all things of earth, air, or ocean seemed lulled to rest in this heavenly

calm. It was impossible for "thoughts to fret or fears to frown" in such an atmosphere of perfect peace.

Hugh's spirit was in unison with the scene round him; his thoughts took to themselves wings, and wandered away into dreamland or revelled in the world of unwritten poetry and romance, with the memory of that one fair face as his sole companionship, for in that one brief meeting it had taken possession of all his senses! It was the first woman's face he had cared to remember. Up to the present time no woman's beauty had made more than a passing impression upon him, they had been reflected on his mind as on the surface of a looking glass, and had left not even a shadowy memory behind! Not that he was difficult to please, or indifferent to the charms of womankind; on the contrary, he was very fond of woman's society, and liked to see bright eyes and laughing

faces, and to hear the chatter of feminine voices round him, and there it ended.

. He was accustomed to the society of pretty women ; they were among the associations of his daily life. If there had been only one or two he might have fallen a victim long ago, but there were so many of them, one effaced the impression of the other before it had time to fix itself on his mind or even on his fancy. Most men suffer from slight attacks of the tender passion before their beards have had time to grow, but they get through them, as they get through the infantine diseases, hooping-cough, or measles, but the one grand passion seizes even them at last, and holds them fast ! But when a man, who has not frittered away his energies, nor weakened his feelings by the frequent exercise of petty emotions, is once caught in the grip of a strong passion, he succumbs ! The strongest has no power to

struggle against it. It was something in this way with Hugh Spencer, but as yet he felt none of the pain, only the glory and sweetness of love's first message. Hitherto his days and years had passed in a round of pleasurable excitements, varied with a little serious study and learning sandwiched in between, a pleasant prelude to the drama of life that was to come. Now the curtain lifted, and the first act of his emotional life had begun. Whether it would hold the stage through the whole five acts, and play it out as a comedy or tragedy—who could tell? Perhaps it would be neither, for in few lives do the real elements of tragedy commingle; and as for the comedy, there generally runs through it an accompaniment of tears; for the most part we struggle through a rather prosaic commonplace existence, varied by a combination of petty cares and troubles, lightened here and there by flashes of senti-

ment or of passion that flames, flickers, and dies out.

Well, Hugh strolled on, feeling strangely excited and happy, for which happiness and excitement there seemed to be no special cause. His "bosom's lord sat lightly on his throne" on this calm, glorious morning; he felt it was a glorious thing to live; merely to live and breathe, with the dimpling waves laughing at his feet and the grand old sun shining in his eyes; he could have flung up his arms and shouted aloud in the exuberance of his spirits; but he didn't; he strolled on whistling softly to himself, now and then stooping to pick up a pebble and fling it into the sea, or to hold a characteristic colloquy with Crib. Presently that intelligent beast stood still, and, with his ragged ears erect and straightened tail, was evidently preparing to go on the war path.

"What's the matter, Crib—eh? what is

it, old man?" exclaimed Hugh, glancing round and seeing nothing: then Crib showed his teeth and began to move slowly forward. Hugh's eyes followed in the direction he was going, and his heart seemed to stand still—for close by, nay, within a stone's throw from where he stood, he beheld the dignified Bouncer silently seated on his haunches, with a sagacious, watchful look upon his face; he was evidently "on guard," for, rising from among the low-lying rocks was an outspread dainty parasol, evidently overshadowing somebody! Hugh flung down his gun, uttered a few emphatic words to Crib, who quite understood that he was left in charge of that instrument of destruction, and must therefore give up his own warlike desires; so lying down he stretched his paws over it, and watched his master, who slowly, very slowly, approached the point of attraction, till Bouncer, in a quiet, gentlemanly fashion,

quite different from the way of common dogs, warned him to come no nearer; but he was near enough to see a fair young face in a state of calm repose, for it was indeed Clarice Lemaire! She had evidently been wandering about till she had grown tired, and sitting down to rest had fallen asleep in that lonely, out-of-the-way spot, with her faithful four-footed body-guard beside her. She had stuck the handle of her parasol in the beach so as to form a shade from the great glare of the sun; her hat lay beside her, and her cheek rested on her hand as with half-parted lips and closed eyes she slept the sleep of innocence and peace. A crimson glow overspread the young man's face! He had a kind of guilty feeling, as though he was taking a mean advantage in gazing at her in her unconscious pose of beauty: but he could not tear himself away, and stood breathless and lost in the contem-

plation of her. However, he was speedily aroused by the sound of footsteps crashing along the pebbly beach, and in another moment Mr. Fleming appeared from round the jutting corner of the rugged cliffs, his white hair streaming in the breeze, a puggeree tied round his wide-brimmed felt hat, and his hands filled with spoils from the sea and shore; in one he held a wicker basket with masses of seaweed and a clinging colony of tiny (some almost invisible) specimens of ocean life, and a heterogeneous gathering of bits of rock and stone, all valuable in his eyes; in the other he carefully carried a green bottle containing some delicate sea anemones and some other quaint inhabitants of the watery world. He looked hot and tired, as though he had been wandering long and far, for he came very slowly, picking his way over the stony beach, Hugh inwardly rejoicing in this

chance meeting, which gave him an opportunity of making the acquaintance of the head of the family in a pleasant, informal fashion. He went forward a few steps, made some trifling remark, and introduced himself. The old gentleman responded with equal cordiality.

“Ah ! I remember,” he said, “we saw you in church yesterday ; we new-comers naturally speculate about our neighbours, and my daughter thought you must be the Rector’s son.”

The idea that she had thought of him at all was a delight to Hugh ; that she had spoken of him thrilled him with joy !

“My mother and sister,” he observed, “talked of paying a visit to the Manor House this afternoon ; for my part I hate morning calls, and congratulate myself on this opportunity of making your acquaintance.”

Mr. Fleming responded, adding : " I fancy there is very little of that kind of visiting in this scattered neighbourhood, where the residents are so few and far between."

" I don't know about that," said Hugh ; " it seems to me that the fewer the people, the more disposed they are for general sociability ; why, bless you, they think nothing of asking you to drive a dozen miles to a dinner party ! "

" Ah ! " exclaimed Mr. Fleming, laughing softly to himself, " but it would be a long time before I undertook such a journey ; there, I can shake hands with you now," he added, relieving himself of his burthens and sitting down on a low-lying rock near by where Clarice was reclining ; and they drifted into a pleasant chat, talking of such local subjects as were likely to interest a new-comer. Meanwhile Bouncer wagged his tail in gentle recognition of their

presence, but made no attempt to relinquish his watch over his sleeping mistress. Crib, evidently dissatisfied with the state of affairs, wanted to be relieved from his position of trust, and tried to attract his master's attention in the most eloquent dog-fashion that he knew, but it was all to no purpose, and he was too good a dog to leave his post without permission.

Presently Clarice opened wide her great blue eyes, and slowly rose from her recumbent position, for a moment dazzled by the great glare of the sun.

"My poor little girl was quite overcome with the heat," exclaimed Mr. Fleming, regarding her with loving eyes. "You're better now, dear child!"

"Yes," she answered, dreamily, as she looked slowly from one to the other, but seemed in no way surprised to see her father so companioned, "I—I think I have been asleep."

“No doubt at all about that,” he answered, “and I found this gentleman, Mr. Hugh Spencer, the Rector’s son, my dear,” he added, performing the brief ceremony of introduction, “had joined Bouncer in keeping guard over you.” She blushed now, her brows slightly contracted, and a vexed look clouded her eyes.

“Hardly that,” Hugh hastened to reply, “I was merely sauntering along the beach when your dog attracted my attention, and—how could I help stealing a glance at his mistress?” She answered nothing, but patted Bouncer’s big head. Hugh took possession of the basket of seaweed, and they commenced strolling along the beach, when a prolonged howl from the desperate Crib made his master turn back. Poor Crib had tried to follow the party, dragging the gun along with him, but the awkward encumbrance was too much for him; he

would not leave it, as a dog of meaner character would have done, so made that piteous appeal for help.

Hugh hastened to his relief, once more flung his gun over his shoulder, and with a few emphatic words put Crib on his good behaviour respecting Bouncer, and then resumed his way, keeping, however, an anxious, watchful eye upon his four-footed follower, not feeling quite sure that Crib's placable aspect was genuine, and he did not want the harmony of this pleasant meeting to be turned to discord by any canine agitation. Clarice could not help noticing his constantly recurring backward glance, and observed:

“Why are you so anxious about your dog? are you afraid of losing him?”

“No; but he is of rather an aggressive nature, and——”

“Oh! you needn't be afraid,” she rejoined

quickly, "Bouncer wouldn't think of fighting with a—little dog like that."

"A cur like that you mean to say, don't you?" he said, noticing her hesitation.

"Well, yes, he is a cur, isn't he?" she asked, innocently.

"Rather," answered Hugh. "I'm afraid poor old Crib hasn't much to boast of in the way of canine blue blood and breeding, but he is the dearest, faithfullest old fellow in the world."

Clarice smiled sympathetically at this tribute to his canine friend, and, glancing with a shy, sweet smile in his face, said:

"I like people who are fond of animals; I'm so fond of them myself; they are intelligent, too, as well as faithful. I'd rather take Bouncer's opinion of a human being than anybody else's."

Hugh felt an insane desire to propitiate Bouncer on the spot, and speculated how

he could best win the good opinion of this important beast. With his thoughts full of Clarice, exulting in his good luck, and so intoxicated with the delight of her presence that he felt as though the laws of gravitation had suddenly changed, and he was walking on air—still he managed to talk like a rational being, addressing himself chiefly to Mr. Fleming, and in a very short time succeeded in mounting him upon his favourite hobby, the wonders and beauties of nature.

“Ah!” exclaimed Hugh, “directly I saw you coming along with your treasures there, I thought you went in for that sort of thing; which do you go in for most—botany, geology, or——”

“Oh! I’m only a bit of a naturalist,” replied Mr. Fleming, “I ‘go in,’ as you tersely put it, a little for everything; one must learn the alphabet of nature before he

can read her works. I only regret that we have time to learn so little, scarce time indeed to recognize our own ignorance, when we are called away."

"But we carry our knowledge with us, father dear; you have always taught me that," said Clarice.

"I hope—I believe so," he answered, as though not quite sure of the fact; "all that is crude, that is unfathomable here will there be perfected and be made plain."

"It would be very disheartening," rejoined Clarice, "to think that all we have struggled to learn and know is to be left behind with our dust and ashes."

"We leave our practical knowledge, all that can be transferred to others, to those whom we leave behind; they begin where we leave off; and so the great invisible superstructure of knowledge rises, and will rise till the universal collapse of nature,

when the old world gives place to a new ; and I believe he is the happiest who contributes most to the great work of human progress."

"Ah!" exclaimed Hugh, trying to look wise, as though he quite understood and appreciated the old man's views, "I dare say it is all very right, but at present I have done very little of that sort of work, and you know I don't think the wisest man is the happiest by a long chalk ; people run after wisdom when they can't enjoy anything else."

"Is that your opinion?" said Mr. Fleming, elevating his brows and regarding the young man rather curiously: "surely the mere fact of contributing to the good of our fellow-creatures must be a source of happiness!"

"But the contributions are not always appreciated," rejoined Hugh ; "people are apt to pelt their benefactors with stones

and garbage, metaphorically if not actually. Now, I think a man who has good health, a good digestion, a wholesome appetite, strength to pull an oar, courage to face a mad bull, and—and the power to appreciate a beautiful woman, when he sees one, has about as much happiness as is good for him.”

“Perhaps all he is capable of enjoying,” said the girl, gravely.

“And perhaps,” added Hugh, “when I have been tried in many fires, and dragged through bitter waters, I may be able to enjoy something better; at present I am tolerably content with things as they are.”

He looked as though he ought to be content, striding along in the full flush of life and flower of manhood, with the rosy dawn of a new love stirring his spirit with a sense of strange, mysterious joy.

“ I know what you mean,” rejoined Clarice : “ you think it is better to keep at the mountain foot, gathering and enjoying such things as fall in your way, than to climb the rugged mountain side, toiling and struggling for the *Edelweiss* ; well, perhaps that is best for oneself, but how about other people ? ”

“ Why, you see,” exclaimed Hugh, logically, “ if every man did the best for himself, he would not need the best of his neighbour ; if no man allowed himself to be naked or hungry, he wouldn’t need another to feed and clothe him, don’t you see ? ”

“ How happy you must be to walk in such contented lines ! ” said Clarice, looking at him with that kind of admiration which a strong, stalwart man is sure to win from frail and dainty womankind.

“ Why, you don’t mean to say that you’re given to that kind of metaphorical climbing

at your age ! It's too bad, almost criminal, to allow it."

"Sometimes I try," she answered, amused at his vehemence, "but it is not much use, I am always falling back ; I'm afraid I'm not much like other people," with a soft little fluttering sigh.

"No," said Hugh, regarding her with a wealth of love light in his eyes ; "I don't think you are."

"Why? why not? Do you notice anything particular about me?" She spoke with an unaccountable and ill-disguised agitation, and watched his face eagerly for his answer.

"You would be angry," he answered, softly, "if I were to tell you how and why I think you are different from any other woman I have seen."

They had left the beach by this time, turned their backs upon the sea, and were

now winding their way upwards through a straggling, wooded path, rich in the fragrance of wild spring-flowers. As Hugh finished speaking, his voice unconsciously lowered almost to a whisper, Mr. Fleming turned round and said :

“We are now close at home—see, the Manor House, as I dare say you know, lies just behind that clump of trees. You are a long way from Penally, Mr. Spencer, and, as you have accompanied us so far, you might as well give us the pleasure of your company at luncheon.”

Hugh was nothing loth to accept the invitation, especially as he fancied Clarice smiled approvingly when it was given ; so the trio progressed upward and onward through the sweet-scented woods, now and then scrambling through the briars and brambles that crowded their path ; sometimes the holly thrust its stiff, prickly arms

in their way ; the men, in their strong garments, struggled through well enough, but Clarice was occasionally caught in the prickly toils, and Hugh had the bliss of extricating her ; now it was her dress, then her parasol, or a fluttering ribbon. She laughed and apologized for the trouble she gave him, for sometimes he actually had to go down on his knees, and even then, with all his care, could not help an ugly rent or two.

“ This is the first time we have taken this short cut,” she said, “ and I don’t think we shall take it again, for it is beset with difficulties.”

“ Delightful difficulties ! ” exclaimed the ardently animated Hugh. “ I wouldn’t have the road smoother if I could.”

“ Short cuts in the road,” said Mr. Fleming, “ are like short cuts to fortune or to fame, generally more or less tangled, and seldom satisfactory in the end.”

They soon reached the old grey Manor House, enclosed by the low stone wall and surrounded by its wilderness of a garden. As they passed into the domain, Mr. Fleming apologized for the disorder of the grounds, saying :

“We have not had time to get things in order yet. The place has been so long deserted and neglected, it will be some time before we can get the ground cleared and the garden arranged as it should be ; beautiful flowers, like other beautiful things, must have time to grow.”

“I like it best as it is,” exclaimed Clarice ; “a really artistically laid-out garden gives me no pleasure at all. I like to see fruits and flowers, shrubs, sweet herbs, and evergreens growing all together. I mean to have a garden of wild flowers, and manage it all myself.”

“Aye, aye,” said Mr. Fleming, “that is

all very well to talk about, we shall have you going in for cultivating *Marechal Niel* roses before we've done."

"A fig for Marechal Niels!" she answered; "a wild white rose or a spray of honeysuckle is far lovelier in my eyes."

"Or perhaps a gooseberry bush or red currant tree," suggested Hugh, laughing.

"A red currant tree, clothed with its rich, transparent fruit, is a very beautiful object," said Clarice, "only it is cheap and useful, and grows in the poorest labourer's garden—that's why people think nothing of it. If it was grown under glass and needed nursing like a sick baby, all the world would rave about it."

"Here we are at home," exclaimed Mr. Fleming, as they crossed the threshold, once more shaking hands with Hugh. "Welcome to the Manor House, though I dare say you are no stranger, and could guide me over

the place perhaps better than I can guide you."

"No," answered Hugh; "we have rarely visited at the Manor House—it has always been difficult to find a tenant for it. You see it is so lonely, so far from everything."

"That's exactly why we like it, father, and I," said Clarice, nestling fondly to the old man's side.

"But your brother may find it dull," suggested the artful Hugh.

"My brother! Oh! Cousin Jack, you mean," rejoined Clarice; "but he comes and goes as he likes—he seldom stays long."

Bouncer, with erect head, marched solemnly into the house after them, as though it was his unquestioned right to do so, while Crib, poor, ragged, disreputable Crib, was relegated to the stable! This was almost more than canine nature could

stand, but obedience was a law, and with a depressed, vicious look in his eyes, and limp, drooping tail, Crib dragged himself after the goodnatured groom, who snapped his fingers, whistled, and tried to make Crib lively and frisky as a dog should be; but his low, guttural accent sounded like an irritating insult to Crib, who bared his teeth, prepared for war, and chased the well-intentioned groom from the spot.

Now, in Bouncer's opinion it was all very well for Hugh Spencer to join their party in the open air, but to be received in the house as a guest was quite another affair, and he at once showed signs of anxiety, if not suspicion. He marched up to Hugh in a grand, imperial way, pricked up his ears, and slowly inspected him from all points, sniffing round him till he was satisfied, and finally signified his approval by laying his huge head on Hugh's knees, and fixed his

soft brown eyes upon him as much as to say, "I think you're all right—I hope you're not deceiving us."

"Bouncer, luncheon!" exclaimed Clarice.

Upon which he marched out of the room, stationed himself at a certain point in the hall, and with his tail beat the Chinese gong, informing the household of the fact that "luncheon was served."

"Ready, Bouncer!" then said Clarice. As she spoke the huge beast raised himself on his hind legs, laid one paw on his mistress's arm and thus escorted her into the dining-room.

"Isn't he a clever beast?" she exclaimed, regarding him proudly as, having performed his duties, he stationed himself beside her for his reward.

The table was laid for four, but only the trio sat down. Seeing Hugh glance at the vacant chair, Clarice smiled.

“That’s Cousin Jack’s place, we never wait for him, and he is never punctual.”

The social meal had not progressed very far, and the stream of conversation was flowing in a pleasant, easy fashion, when “Cousin Jack” entered the room. He was a man older than Hugh Spencer by some years, taller, and of stouter build, with a dark, handsome face, and large, luminous eyes; his curly beard and moustache veiled a mouth that was somewhat stern until it smiled; he looked rather worn and haggard, as though he had seen the world and knew all about it, and had threaded many mazy mysteries in the house of life, while light-hearted, blue-eyed Hugh stood only on the threshold.

“My nephew, Mr. Swayne,” said the host, presenting him to his guest. Thus it happened that when Mrs. and Miss Spencer made their formal visit to the Manor House,

to their amazement they found Hugh strolling about the garden smoking a cigarette with Jack Swayne, and evidently on the friendliest terms with the family.

CHAPTER V.

A FISHING EXCURSION.

M^RS. and Miss Spencer paid quite a long visit to the Manor House, but in spite of their mutual manœuvring—and Miriam was quite as much an adept at that as her mother—they could not guide the conversation according to their desires. They had sallied forth with their keen instincts prepared for “smelling a rat,” and having it out of its hole, tail and all; but somehow they lost the scent. They knew it was lurking somewhere, they felt it in the atmosphere; but not a shadow, not a ghost of it appeared in sight.

Led by their great captain, curiosity, they skirmished about the debatable land, attacking the enemy on all sides, with such weapons as common decency permitted; but their attacks were parried always with such perfect good breeding, that their poor little arrows fell away blunted from contact with the polished surface. They were always answered, but never satisfied. Both mother and daughter pitched upon Clarice as the one of the family most likely to gratify their curiosity, if they could only find themselves alone with her; but it was impossible to put her under the fire of examination, or cross-examination, in the presence of the whole party. So they changed their tactics, and used their moral picklock in another part of the mental machinery, but in a very innocent, natural sort of way. Mrs. Spencer put Mr. Fleming in such a position that he could not avoid

volunteering to show his study, his geological and entomological specimens; and Miriam was seized with a violent desire to inspect the grounds—so she and Clarice sauntered forth accordingly. Miriam gave Clarice's hand a little, tender, schoolgirl squeeze as she said:

“We were so glad to hear that the Manor House was let at last. We began to despair of ever having any neighbours here.”

“Did you?” said Clarice, seeing she was expected to say something, and not knowing what else to say.

“You see people don't generally care to live in such an out-of-the-way place,” added Miriam.

“We like it for that very reason,” said Clarice.

“Oh! I dare say you will find it all very well for a time,” rejoined Miriam, “just while the novelty lasts; and we shall do all we can to make it pleasant for you.”

“You are very kind,” answered Clarice ;
“but I hope you will not trouble yourselves too much about us. We are always very happy together, father and I.”

“When we saw you in church yesterday, we all took such a fancy to you. I knew we should get good friends, and soon know all about one another.”

“Why should we care to know all about one another ?” said Clarice. “I know some people who have grown to be very dear friends, yet they know nothing of each other except their names, and they would not think it delicate to inquire.”

“Oh ! that’s all nonsense !” exclaimed Miriam. “Of course we like to know something of people before we open our hearts to them.”

“Why should you want to open your hearts ?” said Clarice, turning on her a look of surprise. “I don’t see the necessity ;

but," she added with a soft laugh, "you talk of opening hearts as though it were a mechanical process like opening oysters."

Miriam laughed too, and began to talk of sentiments and sympathies, in a way that seemed rather romantic and rather unintelligible to Clarice; and then proceeded to tell her scraps of gossip about the neighbourhood, and finally sailed on to the ocean of her own life, told her all there was to tell, and invented a little more, importing a little masculine element into it, and using it as a kind of bait to fling into the clear crystal of Clarice's mind and fish up any scrap of mystery that might lay therein concealed. Surely her frank open-heartedness must penetrate the reserve of her companion, and force her to speak a little of her own surroundings; but her confidential murmurings had quite a contrary effect. Clarice listened indifferently to Miriam's sentimental chatter.

How could she feel interested in the gossip of a strange neighbourhood, or the tender trivialities which made up the sum of Miriam's life? All this was nothing to her. She only felt a vague wonder that people could talk to her of such things in the very first hour of their meeting. She made no remark, asked no questions, and therefore gave no help to Miriam's confidential communications. However, she got to the end of them, and, giving Clarice another tender little squeeze, she said :

“Now you know everything about me. Let us start fair, and tell me everything about yourself!”

Now Clarice was prepared to be agreeable to her new acquaintance, but it was simply impossible for one of her refined, reticent nature to follow Miriam's example and give a biographical account of herself and her surroundings to one who a few short hours

ago was a stranger. She hardly knew how to answer Miriam's gushing appeal, and after a rather awkward momentary pause—

"I should be very happy," she said, "to tell you anything that I thought would interest you, but really I have nothing particular to tell."

"What, not about that handsome cousin of yours!" exclaimed Miriam, with arch facetiousness; "and how very handsome he is!"

"Is he?" observed Clarice, listlessly.

"Of course he is; don't you think so?"

"I don't know. I have never thought about his looks at all."

"I suppose you are too fond of him to care whether he is handsome or not," said Miriam, tentatively.

"I suppose so," answered Clarice. "You see we have been used to one another all our lives."

There was no blushing or simpering consciousness in Clarice's manner ; she spoke with perfectly simple unreserve. " You are either very stupid or very sly," thought Miriam, regarding her suspiciously in respect to that " handsome cousin."

" And you have no chaperon, no female relative at all ? " said Miriam, inquisitively.

" Chaperon ! no," exclaimed Clarice, impatiently. " What could I want with a chaperon ? "

" It seems so strange for a girl like you to be living with only a—male cousin and step-father," said Miriam.

" Step-father ! " echoed Clarice, looking for a moment puzzled. " Ah ! I forgot that he is only my step-father," she added with a glowing face, " for he is all the world to me—he's father and mother and all."

" You are not in mourning," observed Miriam, hesitatingly. " Is it—is it very long since you lost your mother ? "

“Yes, some years,” answered Clarice, speaking slowly, as though the words were drawn from her with a pair of moral pincers..

Miriam pressed her hand and walked on in sympathetic silence for a moment, then said softly :

“It must be a terrible thing to lose one’s mother, and especially sad to be left with only male relations. We girls want the companionship and sympathy of our own sex. Don’t you think so ? ”

“I hardly know,” said Clarice ; “for myself, I only care for the sympathy and companionship of those I love. Strangers tire me so.”

“How differently I feel about that ! ” exclaimed Miriam. “I love strangers. The very sight of a strange face is delightful. It sets one wondering, and brings a little excitement into one’s life. You see in a quiet place like this one soon knows everybody,

and everything about everybody ; but I suppose you have never settled down in a place like this before ? ”

“ Oh, yes ! ” replied Clarice. “ We lived for some years in the wildest part of Austria, quite among the mountains. Since then we have travelled a great deal.”

“ In England ? ”

“ Oh ! everywhere,” said Clarice. “ We have been to Australia. I was ordered to take the voyage for my health. The doctors said a long voyage would do me good, for my health was quite broken down ; ” and as she spoke she looked dreamily over the sea.

“ Some sudden shock, I suppose ! ” exclaimed Miriam eagerly, thinking she had found a clue to something at last.

“ Why should you suppose any such thing ? ” exclaimed Clarice ; the dreamy light left her eyes as she glanced sharply at Miriam’s face.

“ Oh ! I beg your pardon, but I thought that perhaps your mother had met with some——”

“ What does it matter ? ” interrupted Clarice quickly, “ and please don’t talk of mamma at all—I dislike to hear strangers speak of her.”

For once Miriam was nonplussed, and before she could gather her forces for a reply, the perfume of a cigar greeted their nostrils, and in another moment the two young men, issuing from a tangled side path of the wilderness, stood before them ; and the quartette strolled on together. Chance arranged for them to their mutual satisfaction ; for they soon drifted into pairs, and Clarice found herself *tête-à-tête* with Hugh Spencer, while Miriam was lifted into the seventh heaven by being the sole recipient of Mr. Swayne’s attentions for the full space of half an hour, for it was even such a

length of time that they wandered about the wilderness of a garden and in the orchard, under the full blossoming trees, with the sunlight glinting through, casting fantastic fluttering shadows for their feet to tread upon.

Mr. Swayne was not a man to "make conversation" for ladies generally; he liked to be amused himself, and was sparsely supplied with that special kind of small talk about nothing which goes to make a "delightful man" in the eyes of commonplace young ladies. He had seen a great deal of the world, and was rather tired of it. He was ready to welcome anything that looked like a novelty, either in human nature or anything else. Miss Spencer was rather a novelty to him; her small vanities and perfect self-esteem lay upon the surface, those who ran might read them at the first glance; but the feminine character must be

made up of other things besides these ; so, having nothing better to do for the time being, "Cousin Jack" set himself to find out some of the hidden mysteries which made up the human machine beside him.

She was pleasant enough to look at, tall, fair complexioned, with big blue eyes, that—well, lost some of their dull stupidity now, and brightened into smiles, for it is in reality the eyes that smile the sweetest ; the movement of the lips is a mere muscular accompaniment. How ghastly it is to see a smile upon the lips, while the eyes are cold and unsympathetic ! As a rule Miriam's well-shaped eyes expressed nothing—they had nothing to express ; but to-day they seemed to have found something, as she walked beside this tall, handsome stranger ; and now and then as she glanced up in his dark high-bred face, she thought, with a tremulous fluttering at her heart, "How different he

is to any other man I have ever seen!" But then she had not seen many other men, her view having been restricted to the mankind of Penally, who were generally middle-aged, generally married, and could in no way compare with this elegant being, who seemed to bring the atmosphere of Belgravia into this quiet, out-of-the-way Cornish village. He made some remark about the rugged beauty of the Cornish coast; she answered—

"Yes, we have some very fine scenery all round Penally, if we have no other attraction; the more you know of the neighbourhood, the better you will like it—and in about a fortnight the Bishop of Truro is coming to preach in our church."

"So sorry I shall not be able to benefit by the Bishop's ministrations," said Mr. Swayne, gravely. "I return to town next week, and may not be down again till autumn."

This speech, simple as it was, had a double effect on Miriam ; it gratified her in one way, for if there had really been anything, as she had first suspected, between him and his Cousin Clarice, he would not have spoken of going away for months in that unregretful way ; and at the same time she was disappointed, for from the first transitory glimpse of him in church yesterday she had looked forward to—well, she could hardly say what ; but so many nameless possibilities floated through her mind, she could not, even to herself, explain them exactly. He would have been such an acquisition to the neighbourhood, and quite a sensation at the lawn tennis parties ! for that was the mildest excitement the Penallyites indulged in ; even the Rectory folk tolerated tea and tennis, not having yet discovered the seeds of depravity therein.

“ It is a pity you are going away so soon,”

she observed, "we have a lawn tennis party at the Rectory every week in summer time, and I think you would find them pleasant."

He was sure he should find everything at the Rectory pleasant.

"But lawn tennis!" he exclaimed, "you don't mean to say that you play 'lawn tennis' here?"

"Why not?" exclaimed Miriam, bristling up; "do you think we are heathens because we happen to live out of the world?"

"I don't know that lawn tennis is a lofty mark of Christianity," he replied, gravely; "my wonder was that in the midst of this magnificent scenery, with this wild, picturesque country to ramble about, and all the delicious nooks and corners to explore, you should stoop to such frivolity."

"Ah!" said Miriam, mollified. "One likes a change, you know, and when one

has always been surrounded by magnificent scenery, one doesn't care for it so much."

"Then there's the sea—the grand, glorious old sea! You don't mean to say you don't care about that?"

"No-o," answered Miriam, "I enjoy bathing, but one can't bathe all the year round, you know." She spoke simply, not at all conscious that she was saying anything that could shock a real lover of the "great sweet mother."

The shock his mind received did not reveal itself on the surface, he only said—

"Ah, if you want to appreciate the sea you should go on a yachting excursion. I am never so happy as when I am aboard my yacht; I've got a little beauty, and when she gets the wind in her teeth, and tries to fight her way and buffet the waves, she's like a plucky human creature at work; it's a sight to be proud of, I can tell you; per-

haps I may bring her round here in the autumn, and who knows but I may tempt you and your family party to go for a short cruise in her ! ”

“ Can she go far ? I mean do you confine your cruise to very short journeys ? ”

“ She is two hundred tons, and I can sail her across the Atlantic if I please,” he answered, proudly. “ When you’ve once been aboard her, you won’t rest content till you have your foot upon her deck again.”

A glow of unmistakable delight suffused Miriam’s pale cheeks at the suggestion ; the bare possibility of such a treat would be something to look forward to through the long summer days, for as a rule the months, weeks, and seasons rolled on in a dull, monotonous round. Penally kept the even tenor of its ways, unstirred by the events of the outer world ; even the excitements of a birth, death, or marriage was rare in the

sparsely populated neighbourhood ; no flash of summer glory lighted the horizon of their grey, colourless lives, no feverish waverings between hopes and fears stirred the current of their blood. They tramped the daily round of duties with unswerving footsteps ; the lovely land and sea was as familiar to them as their own faces, and those who are held always in the warm, beautiful embrace of nature will sometimes be disposed to tear themselves from her sheltering arms, and plunge into the turmoil of troublous life, merely for a change. And how gladly would the toil-worn, weary-worlded men sink into the peaceful paradise of this out-of-the-way Cornish village ! It was all satisfactory enough for the elder part of the community, but the young people had a vague longing for some excitement rising either from within or without, which their familiar surroundings did not supply.

In spite of the repressive narrowness of her bringing up, the impulse of young human nature, warm and strong, were hidden away deep down in Miriam Spencer's heart, but they were frozen over by the icy chiliness of the social atmosphere. She was told daily that her life was a blessed one, for which she should kneel down night and morning in gratitude to God, and she had tried to believe it; but now she seemed to have a sudden taste of the sweet savour it needed. A few glances from this man's magnetic eyes, a few pleasantly spoken—by no means important—words from his lips, had stirred her sleeping spirit, and sent a thrill of melody through her hitherto tuneless life. As the stroke of Moses' staff caused a rush of water from the solid rock, so she was ready to pour forth the treasures of her heart at this stranger's touch.

As they two walked on side by side, she

felt as though by some occult process she had been lifted off the earth and trod on air, and he—well, he regarded her with kindly eyes enough; she was evidently well pleased with his society; he thought she “was a nice little thing,” and that was all. A nice little thing! The last epithet any one else would have applied to the stately Miss Spencer.

Before the visitors departed, that social abomination, four o'clock tea, was served, and after arrangements had been made for a future meeting, they parted with cordial hand-shaking all round, and Hugh was compelled reluctantly to escort his female relatives home.

They were no sooner out of earshot, when, as was quite natural, they commenced discussing the family. Mrs. Spencer was evidently well satisfied with her visit. She thought Mr. Fleming was

a delightful old gentleman, quite a man of the world, so very polite too ! He knew how to talk to a lady ; he had been almost confidential with her ; they had talked over certain matters which she did not care to repeat ; she hoped as a Christian she might be trusted. Ah ! yes, and he had taken her into his sanctum, showed her his collection of pickled frogs, centipedes, impaled blue-bottles, butterflies, and other nasty things. There was no harm in it, of course, but in time she hoped to impress him with a stronger sense of his Christian duties ; already he had promised to subscribe to the schools and to give a handsome donation towards the new organ—which showed they had a certain amount of proper feeling. Of course the trail of the serpent was hidden away somewhere, but she hadn't looked for it, and as things looked fair and pleasant on the surface—

well, she was charitable and hoped for the best—at any rate, when they discovered the sin it would be time enough to run a tilt at the sinner. Perhaps she reflected that the running down of gilded sinners would be surrounded with many difficulties, quite different from the poor, half-starved sinners she was accustomed to run to earth.

Her son and daughter let the current of her talk flow uninterruptedly; when she was tired, she looked to them for their opinion. If they had been left to themselves they would rather have walked on, shrouded in silence and the pleasant sunshine; they had each their own unuttered secret, and their hearts were beating in tune to the song without words, such as most human hearts have sung at least once in a lifetime; but they felt bound to exercise their conversational powers to a slight degree. Hugh thought he knew

more of the family than anybody else, and voted "Mr. Fleming a regular trump."

"You had fine romantic ideas of Mademoiselle Clarice yesterday," said Miriam; "what do you think of her now that you have actually spoken to her?"

"Just as I thought before," he answered, "and rather more so." After which ambiguous speech he commenced whistling, and Miriam boldly plumped out her opinion.

"Well, she is certainly very nice; I can quite understand some people thinking her very pretty, too; but there is something very odd about her, poor thing. I don't mean anything bad, only mysterious—a family mystery, perhaps. I did not get on very well with her."

"You seemed to get on better with that long-legged cousin."

"He took pains to get on with me," she

answered ; “ I think he is delightful ; there’s something so lordly and grand about him. With what an air he takes off his hat ! and his clothes fit him so beautifully, too ! There’s a good deal in clothes—I think an ill-dressed man is a horror—but Mr Swayne—well, there’s something distinguished and artistic even in the arrangement of his necktie.”

“ A tailor’s model would evidently be the acme of your admiration, my dear,” said Hugh, “ but I am not going to pronounce any opinion till I know him better ; at present he seems to me rather a supercilious sort of prig.”

CHAPTER VI.

A GLIMPSE OF THE SKELETON.

THE Manor House was scarcely cleared from its clerical visitors when another living inundation swept over the household, for the female Laurence family arrived in a body. The family consisted of Mrs. Laurence and her three daughters, all of a very different type to the Rectory folk. They were well-to-do, kindly people, satisfied with themselves, and generally satisfied with the world around them. They thought it was a very good world to live

in, and if people were not happy it was their own fault, they must be either weak or wicked; if people would only look after their digestion, take plenty of exercise, and keep out of debt, they might make this world a perfect paradise. This was easy enough for them to do, for they had plenty of money; all the good things of this life lay within their grasp—they were favourites of fortune themselves, and believed that everybody else might stand on the same breezy heights if they gave the right turn to the wheel; if they failed it was their own fault—failure or success came where they were most deserved, and there was an end of it. However, they were kind-hearted, gossipy folk in the main. Mrs. Laurence was a London banker's daughter, had been brought up at a fashionable boarding-school, and lived in London till she married. As was perhaps natural, she gave herself a few

airs on that account. She was regarded by her neighbours, the Penallyites, as "quite a superior kind of person ;" she knew a little of everything, from mathematics to mince pies, and had made excursions into the land of literature, plunged into the mysteries of spiritualism, and clung to the skirts of occultism with the tenacious vigour of an uncomprehending apostle.

This happy family was ready to take Clarice to its heart upon the spot ; and, unanimous in their admiration of her beauty, regarding her as a fair, fragile flower, needing only feminine support and feminine companionship to make her perfect, they considered that a mere masculine household must be uncongenial, if not positively harmful, to so young and delicate a piece of womankind.

Clarice had been left to receive her

visitors alone, for on the first appearance of the advancing party Jack Swayne had leaped out of the window and disappeared into the wilderness, and Mr. Fleming had retreated to his study, considering that he had contributed his quantum towards the entertainment of visitors for one day, and it was not incumbent upon him to reappear upon the scene. The Laurences brought with them a fresh breezy atmosphere ; there was no “ peeking and harking,” no undue inquisitorial pressure brought to bear upon the conversation ; if they were curious—and no doubt they shared the general curiosity—they kept it within bounds, and made no outward expression of it. Their manner was genuine and friendly ; they were evidently bent on establishing pleasant relations with the Manor House folk.

“ I wish we were nearer neighbours, my dear,” said Mrs. Laurence, “ but I hope we

shall contrive to see a good deal of you as it is."

"It is only two miles to Penally," said Caroline, the eldest daughter, "and ours is the first house you come to quite this end of the village."

"I can walk two miles very well," said Clarice, smiling; "we went to church yesterday, and I walked both ways. I have been used to a great deal of exercise."

"Then we shall get on first-rate," exclaimed Stella, briskly. "Mamma, perhaps Miss Lemaire will come over and lunch to-morrow, and I will row her home if she likes in the afternoon. When the sea is calm it is quite lovely; you know I keep close to the shore."

"Stella always volunteers to row everybody everywhere," laughed her sister. "If she can only entice people into her boat she's happy."

“Don’t go if you’re afraid of a wetting ; she upset Miriam Spencer near the cove the other day.”

“You’re never tired of remembering that,” said Stella, tartly ; “but it was her own fault—she wouldn’t sit still. It is always somebody’s fault when there’s an accident with a boat.”

“I suppose you have not yet made the acquaintance of the Rector’s family ?” observed Mrs. Laurence, interrogatively.

“Yes, they were here half an hour ago,” answered Clarice.

“Humph !”—there was something peculiarly expressive in Mrs. Laurence’s humph—“well, I don’t think you’d get on very well with them ; nobody does. They are too self-righteous to please *me* ; they mean well, but they take hold of everything at the wrong end. Mr. Spencer has a way of talking at people from the pulpit which is

very hurtful to sensitive natures. It would be all very well if he confined himself to reproving the poor ; they rather like it, and feel honoured that even their faults should attract public notice ; but he once had the bad taste to attack *me* ! ”

“ He laid the lash on very lightly, mamma,” rejoined Miss Laurence, “ and after all it was not really *you* he attacked, so much as the principles of spiritualism.”

“ He knew that *I* advocated those principles, and had no right to hold them up to public condemnation,” said Mrs. Laurence, adding, “ but people get so narrow in the country ; they prefer groping along in the old darkness to opening their eyes to a new light. Now, I have lived in the great world, and take larger views. I am always ready to discuss and investigate any new theory or question that may rise up, no matter whether it be political, scientific, or spiritualistic.”

“But you are rather more given to the latter, mamma.”

“Because I can easily pick up the grains of truth and separate them from the chaff of imagination. Do you go in for that sort of thing, Miss Lemaire?”

“For what sort of thing?” inquired the slightly bewildered Clarice.

“For the spiritualistic science, for a science it is fast becoming.”

“I don’t know anything about it,” answered Clarice.

“No? well I am surprised at that,” said Mrs. Laurence, “for I should say you have very strong mediumistic qualities yourself.”

“Please don’t say that!” said Clarice, shrinking as though she had received a blow; “if I thought I had them,” she added, laughing rather hysterically, “I should be inclined to undergo a surgical

operation and have them cut out with a knife."

"Ah, my dear, if a surgeon's knife could perform operations on the mind as well as on the body I fancy we might all give him some little work to do ; they say we are all mad on one subject or another."

The girls laughed, and each expatiated on her own particular mania, which was all harmless enough, and the conversation rippled away from grave subjects and lost itself in a maze of pleasant chit-chat or small talk, which is current in all societies, both great and small, and flows on its sparkling way without scandal or deleterious gossip, brightening and enlivening the passing hour, and when it dies out leaves the ashes of nobody's reputation behind it.

They parted, each mutually pleased with the other, Clarice promising to spend a long day at the Firs on the earliest opportunity.

"Tired, my little girl?" said Mr. Fleming, coming into the room soon after their departure.

"Not very," she answered; "though it is rather alarming, isn't it—seven visitors in one day? These Laurences seem rather nice; I like them better than the Rectory people—except, perhaps, Mr. Spencer, the young one I mean."

"I hope you will get up a little pleasant intimacy with your neighbours, my dear Clarice," said Mr. Fleming; "I am sure the companionship of people of your own age will be good for you."

"No companionship of anybody ever can be so good for me as yours," she answered, clasping her hands round his arm and laying her head caressingly upon his shoulder, "darling dad, we are always so happy together, you and I."

"Make it a trio," he added, looking

scrutinizingly on her face ; “ won’t you admit Jack into the circle ? ” There was a slight knitting of the brows, and a troubled look came into her eyes, but she answered nothing. “ Why are you so perverse, my child ? You and Jack used to be such friends, and now that it would be well you should be drawn closer together you fling yourselves wider apart.”

“ Things are different now,” she answered, pettishly ; “ Jack is getting troublesome—and—ah !—when is he going away ? When shall we two be left alone together ? Jack is like the fifth wheel to a coach ; we don’t get along so well as we used to.”

“ His going or staying depends very much on you, Clarice,” he answered, gravely. “ You are both very dear to me, and you know which way my wishes run.”

“ I know, I know ! ” with signs of some little irritation ; “ but they run in the wrong

direction, darling dad," she added, coaxingly. "If you would only see, if you would only understand, that what you wish can never, *never* be, things would settle back in the old way, and we should be so much happier."

"When the unity of things is once disturbed and broken up they never settle back into the old ways—it is against nature that they should."

"And it is against my nature that they should grow into a new," said Clarice; "I wish I could make you sure of that."

"Is it really so impossible, Clarice?"

"Quite," she answered, emphatically.

The old man sighed.

"Well, my child," he said, "I should not wish to force your inclination, but you don't quite realize the risk you run. Were things to come to the push, *I* have no authority, no power, to save you. In Jack's custody,

with *him* as your husband and legal protector, you would be safe."

"I am safe now," she answered, in a low voice; "you have said that you would kill me rather than let me fall into *his* hands, and I know you would keep your word."

"Child, you think I should have courage enough for that!" he said, in a tender, melancholy tone.

"I *know* you would," she answered, like one well assured of a fact.

"Well, well," said he, "I pray God no such necessity will ever come! If you are really decided, I had perhaps better speak to Jack, and put him out of suspense."

"I think not," she answered. "I will take the first opportunity and speak to him myself."

"Best make the opportunity and speak at once; when a disagreeable thing has got to be done, there is no use in delaying it;

as there is no chance for him there is no use in his lingering here—he had better go away at once,” the old man ended, with a sigh.

Clarice flung her arms round his neck, and her eyes overflowed with tears as she exclaimed, with much emotion :

“Oh, why are you so good, so patient with me? I wish I had never been born, to bring so much trouble to everybody! Now poor Jack—whom you love, your own sister’s son—is to be exiled from his home, on my account! Father dear!” she added, after a few moments’ silence, blinking away her tears, “for your sake I would marry him if I could; but I dare not. I am afraid—afraid of myself. I think it would be a crime to marry.”

“My own child,” he answered, fondly laying his hand upon her golden head, “I speak only for your own good now, and altogether without any reference to Jack; but

I honestly think, indeed, I am convinced, that if you were once married, once in the safe keeping of a good man's love, all these strange morbid fancies that afflict you would vanish. In the wholesome exercise of your natural affections, in the opening of a new life, new ties, new scenes, new associations and surroundings, the clouds which now warp and sadden your beautiful nature would fade away, and leave you to live your life as bright and happy as God made it."

"I don't believe God had anything to do with my life," she answered, desperately; "how could He, when I was born in such a dreadful place?" She shuddered violently as she added, "Sometimes I think I shall die in it."

"Hush, hush!" he answered, soothingly, "you must not give way to such thoughts as these."

"I don't give way," she answered, "I have nothing to do with them, they take hold of me—my heart, my brain, my limbs, and weigh me down, and darken the whole world, so that I hardly know whether the sun shines or not—but one can't speak of those things, one can only feel. Perhaps if I could get——"

The last words trailed unconsciously, almost inaudibly, from her lips, her arms relaxed their hold and fell nerveless by her side, and she lay in his arms as unconscious and white as one dead. He did not seem alarmed at this sudden seizure; he carried her to the sofa, arranged the cushions for her head, and laid her gently down, and sat beside her, watching, and chafing her hands with a slow, caressing motion. He called for no assistance, he needed none, he knew there was nothing to be done but wait patiently her return to life. The window

was open, and the sweet fresh air blew in from the breezy sea, far away in the dim horizon the great red sun was sinking slowly into the ocean, its last level rays striking across the water, touching the bowed grey head of the man, and resting on the girl's unconscious face like a finger of light.

Not very long had things remained in this condition when there was a loud ring at the bell, and in another moment a quick step sounded in the hall, and Dr. Parkes was shown into the room. His advent just at that moment was specially annoying and vexatious to Mr. Fleming; but it could not be helped, and there was no one to blame for it; that was the usual room for the reception of visitors, and the servants had not been made aware of their young mistress's condition. This was not the Doctor's first visit to the Manor House, or he would have timed it more decorously; he had made

Mr. Fleming's acquaintance some days previously, and being interested in his collection of natural curiosities, had enjoyed a most congenial interview, and on parting had promised to bring some chemicals of which he was in need to carry on a special experiment; being in the neighbourhood, he had brought them at, what seemed to him, a most opportune time.

His eye rested at once on the prostrate figure of the girl; a momentary glance of recognition was exchanged between himself and Mr. Fleming, as he stepped briskly forward, exclaiming, with professional brevity:

“Can I be of any use?”

“Thanks; I think not,” replied Mr. Fleming, extending his unoccupied hand to the Doctor's genial clasp. “She will be better presently; it is only a little nervous exhaustion—that is all.”

“All! humph!” exclaimed Dr. Parkes;

“poor little girl! Is she liable to these seizures?”

“No-o—not exactly liable,” replied Mr. Fleming, slightly hesitating; “but she is peculiarly constituted. I have seen her so before. There is really no cause for alarm,” he added, rather sharply, as though irritated by the grave expression of the Doctor’s face. “She will be all right presently—indeed, quite herself.”

Dr. Parkes could not help seeing that he was considered rather *de trop*, his unexpected presence slightly embarrassing to Mr. Fleming, and his professional services by no means desired. He scrutinized the white young face with much interest, blended with sincere compassion, he saw at a glance that it was no mere fainting fit—but just such a case as he would dearly like to lay hold on, watch over, and investigate with all his professional ability; but he could

not infringe etiquette so far as to press his services unasked, especially as the investigation of the case might prove rather interesting from a pathological point of view than of benefit to the patient. He laid his hand lightly on Mr. Fleming's arm as he said sympathetically :

"My dear sir, you know what pleasure it would give me to be of any service to you, directly or indirectly, professionally or otherwise. At any time," he added, casting a lingering look on the unconscious girl, "I shall be glad to advise you as a friend—as —as well as a physician."

"Of that I feel sure, and I thank you," answered Mr. Fleming, "and if at any time I find the necessity arise, I shall not scruple to avail myself of your kindness. At present I am quite equal to the occasion."

"Then perhaps I had better leave you," said Dr. Parkes, hoping he would say

“stay ;” but he did not ; he said quickly, “Yes, I think perhaps that would be best —when she recovers consciousness she might be alarmed at the presence of a stranger.”

Dr. Parkes accordingly took his leave and went home, and said nothing whatever about his visit. He kept his thoughts and suspicions to himself. He fancied he had caught a glimpse of the ghost of the Manor House, but, like many mental speculators, he took the shadow for the substance, and sent his imagination travelling on the wrong track altogether.

He had not been very long gone when Clarice stirred, the colour came slowly back to her face, the old expression came back to it. She opened her eyes and picked up the thread of the conversation precisely where it had left off, continuing, without even repeating the last words, as though

the phrase had never been broken, "get away from myself for a little while, and not only feel but be somebody else. I should come back and take possession of my old body, and begin a new life in a new spirit. Darling dad," she exclaimed, after a momentary pause, "every step I take, every day of my life, by daylight or by starlight, I stand still and watch and listen—my spirit does, I mean—for I feel I am going forward to meet something—something weird and gruesome is coming steadily forward, coming slowly day by day to meet *me*. I can't get away from it—I can't hide from it. If I were to die, I believe it would prevent my getting into my grave!"

"You must fight against these fancies," exclaimed Mr. Fleming, rather sternly for him; he had exhausted his arguments long ago, he could not combat things he did not understand. Against the air-drawn dagger

—so menacing, so real, to the one diseased mind—who can draw the sword? The things we fear are always greater than those we suffer; whereas reason and common sense can fight against and overcome real tangible difficulties—they fail when they are hurled against phantoms in the air. Mr. Fleming sometimes got impatient with his darling, impatient because he could not comprehend, could not follow the somewhat sombre, intricate mazes of her mind wherein she herself was too often lost and dazed. “You are over sensitive, darling, and too imaginative,” he added, after a brief silence; “your nerves are too highly strung, and cruel circumstances have given them a twist awry. You frighten yourself with false fears, and live in dread of things that never happen. You *must* rouse yourself, Clarice; we have quite enough real difficulties to contend with. I can protect you from the

actual ills that threaten you, but I cannot protect you against yourself. Try and throw yourself into the life of this lovely place ; interest yourself in your neighbours, go among the poor and suffering and see what you can do to help them, for in helping others through their troubles we, to some extent, forget our own."

"I'll try, father dear, I will try," exclaimed Clarice, with a sudden change of manner ; " but don't let us talk any more—I'm tired. Where's Jack ? I saw him pass the window a little while ago. Tell him he may come and read to me if he likes."

CHAPTER VII.

TWO ARE COMPANY.

THE intimacy between the three families ripened rapidly during the next two or three weeks ; both Jack Swayne and Hugh Spencer still remained in Cornwall, though they had both been due elsewhere for some time past, but in some way each seemed to be suspicious of the other, each seeming determined to outstay the other, and see him safely off the scene. Although this was pretty evident, they were very good friends apparently, and “ my dear fellow’d ”

each other freely, after the manner of their kind.

Nothing of any particular interest occurred, the days rolled uneventfully on, though the visiting between the neighbours became fast and furious, the distance between their several dwellings was spanned as by a magic bridge. One day there was a luncheon party at the Laurences', another a picnic in the Manor House woods, or among the wild, picturesque rugged rocks at the Land's End, or perhaps they would enjoy an *al fresco* kettledrum at the Manor House, with long delightful strolls upon the shore, scrambling among the rocks in an emulous hunt for sea anémones or any other weedy or crustaceous wonder they could pick up, sometimes prolonging their wanderings till the sun had set, strolling homeward to the Manor House through the misty twilight, and there they generally found a cold col-

lation temptingly awaiting them, which, of course, induced them to prolong their visit till unseasonable hours, and they amused themselves with pleasant chit chat and bright badinage, or perhaps a little music ; for the only accomplishment which Hugh possessed, that was not purely masculine, was a talent for music ; he was a tolerably good violin player and had a fine voice, a tenor, which under cultivation would have been a rare possession.

He and Clarice had found out and thoroughly appreciated each other's musical abilities. He sang in good style, and his performance was infinitely superior to that of amateurs generally, and when he could induce Clarice to blend her rich, glorious voice with his in a duet he seemed to climb the heights of felicity at a bound, and sang as though he would sing his soul away. Then there were long lingering pressures of

the hand, sometimes a few tender words at parting—which was perhaps a natural result of the romantic wanderings through the long dreamy summer days, and the soft influence of the moonlit nights ; for Clarice and Jack generally strolled with their visitors on a part of their homeward way, and more than once it had been nearly midnight before they returned through the hushed woods beneath the light of the weird white moon.

The air at that time was so soft and delicious, the sound of the unfathomable silence so soothing, and the mysterious murmur of the sea, as its phosphorescent wavelets rolled in along the shore, was so suggestive, so full of spiritual eloquence, that Clarice was never tired of listening to it. She enjoyed a ramble by night more than a stroll by day ; if she could have followed her own inclination she would

have walked for hours ; she was never tired of watching the moonlight creep silently over the sleeping land, gliding along over the hill-tops, sweeping down into the valleys, piercing the tangled woods, and gliding from point to point, resting here in a gleam of ghostly whiteness, then passing on and leaving a host of trailing shadows behind it.

Through all this change in her life Clarice seemed merging into a brighter, happier self, and Mr. Fleming, who watched her with anxious, loving eyes, rejoiced to see her gradually improving in all respects ; she certainly was better in health, and in every way seemed more contented and at rest ; the smile came more frequently to her lips, and her eyes shone with a quiet, peaceful light that he never remembered to have seen there before. She took more interest in the common affairs of daily life, and indeed seemed to have entered upon a

new plane of existence altogether, while her manner to Jack was decidedly more friendly and affectionate than it had been for many a day. They had neither of them made any reference to the darling project of his heart since they had last spoken together on the subject, but whether this augured well or ill for its success he was afraid to speculate; he must watch and wait. Whether her present tranquillity would be lasting, consequent upon the modification and change in her life—for the present social condition with the new elements introduced into it was a great change—or was only a mere mood, a lull upon the surface of her nature, leaving the subtle stormy current unchanged below, he could not tell.

A great deal of her present content he attributed to the friendly and familiar relations that had been established between herself and other young people of her own

age ; he encouraged their frequent visits to the Manor House ; he preferred that Clarice should receive her young friends there, rather than that she should visit them at their own homes. He liked to see the young people twittering about the garden like heedless young sparrows, or otherwise amusing themselves in the many ways peculiar to their age and inclinations, and when he caught the sound of Clarice's low, rippling laughter, blending with the more boisterous tones of her companions, he smiled with inward satisfaction. Sometimes he thought the young men might employ their time better, that it was being wasted, frittered away in feminine society ; yet he would not regret it if matters between Clarice and Jack were ripening quietly towards the fruition of his great desire—almost the one desire of his life now.

He had no idea how the rambling party conducted itself, whether they strolled about a compact body, or straggled off in pairs, like the animals in Noah's Ark, each according to its kind and affinity; he never troubled himself to think about it. Jack and Clarice were so closely, so indissolubly linked together in his mind, that the idea of any other man or woman having the power to draw them apart by the action of any natural magic or mesmerism, to attract the one from the other, never entered his mind; *it could not be!* That the natural perversity of human nature should divert itself by playing a game of cross purposes on this special occasion was a thing undreamt of in his philosophy. However, as it happened, things generally fell out something in this wise. Though the party might be closely allied at starting, the general conversation soon began to flag,

and they drifted into pairs, and somehow chance or fate decided that Hugh Spencer should find himself beside Clarice, and attached Jack Swayne to Miss Spencer's skirts. The Misses Laurence, healthy-hearted, good-natured girls, were thrown off into a kind of skirmishing party, and fired little saucy shots into the *tête-à-tête* stragglers, which were caught up and answered in the friendliest fashion.

It is by no means certain that the arrangement was productive of general satisfaction. As a rule, in these little matters, some one would like to change places with somebody else ; but as somebody else is supremely content, there is small chance of a change in the arrangements, and the discontented veils his vexation by an appearance of uproarious good spirits, for if he shows his annoyance, or allows a tip of the green-eyed monster's tail to reveal itself,

he lays himself open to mild attacks of banter and merciless badinage, which are insupportable to the manly spirit.

To Miriam Spencer these seaside or woodland wanderings came to be the only things worth living for ; she was unaccustomed to the world, and had never dreamed that such a man as Jack Swayne would ever drift across her path. In her eyes

“ He seemed the goodliest man
That ever among ladies sate in hall,
And noblest ! ”

As though roused by some subtle power, her whole soul, awakened from its dull lethargic calm, became absorbed in the thought of him. The world seemed to revolve in a new orbit, everything seemed so changed and bright. She believed that he eagerly sought her society, when it was mere chance which threw him into it—that he desired no better thing than to wander

by her side beneath the summer sun. The courtesies and small complimentary nothings, which pass current and do good lip-service in general society, she received as the pure gold coinage of the love-lands, in circulation only when the heart is touched, and the wandering fancy chained by the heart's affection; and he—well, he was blind to the soft love-light dawning in her cold blue eyes.

When, as it often happened, they found themselves thrown together in solitary companionship, he naturally devoted himself to her, and endeavoured to make the time pass pleasantly, as he felt a gentleman was bound to do, and to which he was perfectly well inclined. He thought she was rather cold and reserved, and, perhaps, took a little more pains than he need have done, to find out whether she had a heart or not, without, however, having the slightest idea of bring-

ing down upon himself the avalanche of her affections !

He never reflected that human nature has volcanic qualities, and a passionate heart is often hidden by a cold exterior. Although he seemed absorbed by Miriam Spencer, his thoughts and his eyes constantly turned upon that other pair chatting so pleasantly ahead of him ; and when he heard Hugh's fresh voice ring out on the still air, and caught a glimpse of Clarice's fair face smiling a comment or reply in answer, his broad brow contracted into a frown, and an ominous cloud gathered in his eyes, which those who knew him well would not have cared to see ; but Miriam was too obtuse, too well assured of the effects of her own charms, to comprehend those delicate signs of emotion, and tripped by his side, with a light heart, rejoicing.

On one of those excursions—the last, as

it chanced to be—as they were scrambling among the rocks, Clarice's foot got entangled among the slippery sea-weed, and in her endeavours to disengage herself she lost her balance and fell. Hugh, who was close by, sprang forward with outstretched hand to arrest her fall, but too late ; he fell into a pool of water himself, and by the time he had picked himself up Clarice had scrambled into a sitting posture, but seemed unable to rise to her feet, even when he came to her assistance. She looked up at him with a piteous expression of countenance, as she said :

“ I'm afraid I've hurt my foot ; I cannot stand.”

“ Try now ; with my help, perhaps you can,” answered Hugh, promptly giving her the support he thought necessary. “ Now try.”

“ It is no use. I can't ; and—oh ! it is

such pain!" she moaned; "my ankle gives way under me. If I could only get on to the beach and rest a little!"

"Shall I—will you let me carry you?" he said, eagerly. "I—I am very sorry, but I fancy there is no other way of getting you to the land." He blushed like a girl as he spoke, and she answered in embarrassed hesitation:

"Oh, dear! it was so stupid of me! and I'm afraid I'm too heavy—and it is so slippery. I'm afraid we should both fall down."

He lifted her as though she were but a feather's weight, and, balancing himself, carefully picked his way over the wet weed-covered stones, and soon deposited her on a rough boulder upon dry land. Meanwhile Jack Swayne, slowly sauntering along the shore, as usual by Miriam's side, now exchanging pleasantries with Stella Laurence,

or picking up pebbles and pelting the waves, or shooting tender common-places into Miriam's expectant ears, saw from afar off what had happened, and uttering a hurried exclamation under his breath, strode rapidly forward, soon covered the ground between them, and stood by Clarice's side, looking down upon her with a look of angry solicitude upon his face, as he said, shortly—

“What is it, Clarice? What has happened?”

“Oh, nothing much,” she answered, as cheerfully as she could, considering she was in pain; “only I slipped upon the rocks, and hurt my foot.”

“If I had been with you it wouldn't have happened,” he said, shortly, without glancing at Hugh, who, without taking the least notice of the base insinuation, smiled brightly down on Clarice, saying, with an aggravatingly tender air—

“You’ll be better after a little rest. Somebody wet a handkerchief—you, Miss Stella, and make a bandage for the poor little foot.”

“Nobody could have helped it, Jack,” said Clarice, answering his angry look deprecatingly, and somehow feeling that Hugh had fallen into disgrace. She tried to throw oil upon the troubled waters, and instead of smoothing matters, with tactless innocence added fuel to the smouldering fire of Jack’s wrath, as she said—

“I don’t know what I should have done without Mr. Spencer; he was so kind, and carried me all over the slippery rocks.”

“Very kind of him,” said Jack; “I don’t suppose any other man would have done as much! How can we ever recompense such courage—such chivalry?”

“Don’t mention it, my dear fellow,” answered Hugh, with imperturbable good-

humour; "it was a real pleasure, I assure you."

Meanwhile Stella had dipped her handkerchief into the sea, and proceeded to bind up the injured foot, while Jack stooped down and held a low-voiced and evidently sympathetic colloquy with Clarice, for after a few minutes' quiet talk, she said—

"Yes, really, I am better now; in a few minutes I shall be able to walk, I think, though, perhaps, slowly."

"If you are not, you know," said Hugh, "my—what was it?—courage and chivalry are still at your service; I shall be delighted to resume my burden, and carry you home."

"Thanks," said Jack, answering for her; "as I said before, you are very kind, but now that I am here, there is no necessity for troubling any one. If you are really inclined to be useful, you might run up to the Manor House and send down the pony-

carriage to meet us at the nearest point, though I hardly know where that is."

"I know," replied Hugh; "I'll bring the carriage myself, and then run down and fetch you along. *Au revoir!* I shall not be long."

Although Clarice suffered from a slight sprain only, it was enough to confine her for some days to the house—days, however, that passed pleasantly enough, for there was no brooding time allowed her; her young friends were unremitting in their attentions, and every day some of them dropped in to amuse her with the little gossip of the town—poor, twaddling stuff it was, molehills magnified to mountains, and commonplace facts swollen to romantic incidents; but their good, genial spirits and fresh, breezy voices could but have a healthful influence on Clarice's more delicately organized, morbid nature. Besides

the visits of her female friends, her solitude was enlivened by Hugh's companionship, for, punctual as clockwork, he made his appearance at the Manor House, and always with some little offering in his hand—a bunch of wild flowers, fresh from the woods, a book, a poem, or any little thing that might please her passing fancy. His coming was generally heralded by Jack Swayne, who, with pleasant *bonhomie*, escorted him into the library, where Clarice reclined upon her sofa with the windows flung wide open, while the song of birds mingled with the sweet scent of flowers, and the briny breath of the sea swept in with invigorating freshness. Jack was apparently in the best of spirits, and enlivened the interview with cheery, pleasant talk. He always remained till the end of the visit, and then escorted Hugh out of Clarice's presence with more inward satis-

faction than he had ushered him into it.

Unfortunately, so Hugh thought, he was compelled to return to Cambridge before Clarice was well enough to enjoy another ramble through the blossoming woods, which were fast bursting into their summer bloom, and he somewhat rebelled against the constant, though genial presence of Jack Swayne, during the brief time he passed in her society. He called late one afternoon to take his leave ; by skilful manœuvring he had contrived to leave the members of his own family at home, and timed his visit so that Jack should be absent, taking his daily constitutional ; but he had evidently changed his daily habit, for when Hugh arrived, there was the irrepressible Jack lounging on the terrace, as though actually awaiting his arrival. He greeted Hugh, and shook

hands with him more cordially than ever. The young men walked up and down, smoked a cigar together, and chatted upon such subjects as came uppermost in their minds. Presently Jack said, with a provoking air of cool proprietorship—

“ You’ll be glad to hear that Clarice is getting on splendidly ; she walked across the room this morning without assistance. Would you like to see her, eh ? ”

Hugh replied that he certainly should ; in fact he had come purposely to say “ good-bye,” as he was going back to Cambridge, and might not return to Penally for some time.

“ Ah ! ” exclaimed Jack, with some satisfaction. “ I finished my grind long ago, thank God ; I can come and go as I please now, no more exams., no more anything disagreeable. But, come along, we’ll go in to our fair invalid at once.”

There are times when the society of our dearest friend may be dispensed with, and this was one. Jack's substantial figure loomed darkly between Hugh and Clarice, and, for Hugh, dimmed the brightness of the parting hour. If he could only have had five minutes' *tête-à-tête* with her! Not that he had anything particular that he dared to say, only he would fain have had her low-voiced, sweet "good-bye" fall upon his ear alone—the light of her soft blue eyes shine upon him only, with no shadow between to intercept a single ray. He longed to send one secret, silent message from his soul to hers, that she might know and feel, without the aid of words, how much he loved her, and how much of himself he left behind him. But the antagonistic influence of Jack's presence stood between them, and stirred the atmosphere with an adverse current which flowed like a

subtle invisible cloud between them, and so their parting was a mere commonplace "good-bye." He held her hand with a long, lingering pressure, that was scarcely necessary, in Jack's eyes, as he said :

"I am sorry to go ; but for your accident we should have had our excursion to the Land's End ; you know nothing of the grand picturesque beauty of our coast till you have been there ; now it must be postponed."

"Don't distress yourself, my dear fellow, it won't be postponed for long," said Jack, with aggressive cheerfulness ; "I mean to drive Clarice over as soon as she is able to bear the fatigue of a long excursion ; we'll get up a jolly little picnic and—drink your health with the first bottle of champagne."

"I shall miss Mr. Spencer dreadfully," said Clarice, as her eyes dreamily followed

his retreating figure disappear into the wilderness, "he has been so attentive since my little accident," and she sniffed at the last bunch of wild flowers he had brought her; "so kind of him," she added, "to come here every day to amuse me, he always managed to cheer me up—it must have been dull work too."

"Very," replied Jack. "I wonder how he survived it! seriously, Clary, I think we ought to present him with a testimonial in the shape of a piece of plate, duly inscribed, setting forth his virtues, don't you know, as they do when a fellow distinguishes himself in——"

"Don't talk nonsense, Jack," she answered smiling, with an impatient toss of her pretty head; then, as though suddenly struck by the idea that she had let all Jack's devotion pass without a word of recognition, she added, laying her hand in his, "You

have been very good too, Jack, but then you always are. Somehow, one expects it of you, it seems natural that you should do everything and be everything. I wish I could do something for you in return, Jack, but I can't, I can't! And you have spoilt me always, ever since father first brought me home ; how long, how very long ago that seems ! Who would have thought such days as these could be born of such a time as that ? ” She spoke slowly, her voice and her thoughts seemed to trail back into the past, the sweet expression which had lately dawned upon her face faded from it, and left it white and set with the strange sad look that he knew so well ! It was as though a shadow from the unknown years had fallen over her and clouded her spirit, and gathered all her thoughts together and focussed them upon some terrible spot in the past that shut out the light of the sun.

Jack was patient, he knew the mood would pass away. He sat by her side, holding her hand in his sympathetic clasp, and watched and waited.

CHAPTER VIII.

SHE SAYS "NO!"

HUGH turned his back upon Penally and went away with lingering footsteps; the buoyant lightness of his spirit was left behind him, and he carried away in his heart something that was new and strange to him, and sweet withal, but the sweetness, for the moment, was touched with the bitter pain of parting. He seemed suddenly to have merged into another self. It seemed incredible that only a month ago he had come down to Penally a free man—free in body and in mind, light of heart as lithe of

limb, with no thought for to-morrow, no cloud to dim the brightness of to-day. Now he was a changed man. Something had been born into his life that would never leave it, and had turned its current from the laughing level plains of the world's highways, where commonplace life deports itself in commonplace fashion, and plunged it into soft mysterious depth, where the lights and shadows of romance fall flickering on the present and light up the future with the passionate glow of a man's first love.

The thought of Clarice possessed him wholly, and coloured all his thoughts, hopes, and aspirations ; he could paint no scene on the broad canvas of his future, wherein she was not the principal figure, fair in the foreground, leaving all the rest in shadow. Strange to say he was not troubled with the thoughts of Jack ; he regarded him simply as a stumbling-block, not as a rival ; why !

he had been with her all his life, and had such opportunities of winning her affections as no outsider could ever hope to enjoy, and as she was still unwon—of that he felt well assured—there was no chance of his winning her now. The atmosphere of secrecy which enveloped Clarice, and lifted her out of the common groove of womankind, increased her fascinations a thousandfold. He felt that the mystery would one day be unravelled, and unravelled by his hand. He fancied, from a stray word she had once let fall, that he had found a clue to it, and resolved to hold that clue fast in his memory, and follow it to the end. If he could have seen whither it would lead him, he would perhaps have dropped it and turned his face towards the other end of the world.

It was nearly twilight, a few days after Hugh Spencer's departure, and Clarice, who

had progressed rapidly, and was now able to walk without discomfort, was out upon the terrace. For a time she paced up and down with rapid, restless footsteps—then she stopped suddenly and leaned over the stone wall with her face turned seaward. She remained there a long time, watching the delicate cloudlets of amethyst and gold which were floating like angels' wings on the horizon. Jack was not far off; he was seated under a tree with a cigar between his lips. With a tender love-light in his eyes, he watched Clarice, as she stood in the after-glow of the sunset, her rapt face half veiled in shadow. A solitary thrush called from its bower of green; but for that one musical trill, a sweet dewy silence brooded everywhere, a silence just haunted by the inarticulate murmurings of invisible nature; the air was stirred with sweet odours, and the spirit of peace and purity

seemed moving like an invisible presence over the drowsy land. Jack presently flung away the end of his cigar and slowly crossed to Clarice's side.

"You had better come in, dear," he said ; "we must take care of you, it is getting chilly, and the dews are beginning to fall."

"It is warm and delicious, and there are no dews yet," she answered, slightly rebelling as he persisted in wrapping a shawl about her shoulders.

He kept his arm round her, and looked on her with fond yearning which she, and she only, could call into his grave dark eyes.

"How quiet and silent you are !" he said, softly. "Clarice, darling, what are you thinking of ?"

"I—nothing," she answered, briefly.

"Nothing !" he echoed, incredulously ; but in truth it often happened that she was

thinking of nothing; for a hazy nebulous something seemed working in her brain, trying to resolve itself into rays of thought, but the light was lost in the shadowy wanderings of her imaginations, and presented only a shapeless mass of tinted mysteries to her mind's eye. His earnest gaze vexed her. She turned her head away impatiently, as she said:

"It is very rude to stare at people so. I wish you wouldn't, for I don't like to be looked at so—indeed I very much dislike it."

"Dislike to be looked at by those who love you! That is strange."

"Not at all strange," she answered. "Why, even Bouncer growls if you stare at him straight in the face!"

"Perhaps Bouncer has a bad conscience, and being given to evil ways has been robbing the larder."

"Bouncer doesn't do such vulgar things."

Jerry might ! he's such a greedy beast, never satisfied ; he has no conscience at all ; I'm sure if he were human he'd prefer stealing to getting an honest living."

Jack was silent. He was not going to be driven from his point by a discussion on canine vices or virtues. His silence seemed to jar upon her in some way ; for after a momentary pause she added quickly :

" I'm going in now."

" No, don't go yet, it won't hurt you to be looked at a little longer, even by me. I've seen somebody else look at you lately, and you didn't seem to object."

" I know what you mean," she answered, turning her face away from his ardent gaze ; " but that was different ; *he* didn't look at me as you do."

" Of course he didn't," said Jack, decidedly, " I'd thrash him into a cocked hat if he did."

"Oh, Jack!" exclaimed Clarice, breathless with horror at such a threat.

"I don't see why he wants to look at you at all," added Jack; "you are nothing to *him*, and you're all the world to *me*."

"Please don't talk like that," answered Clarice; "you know that I *never* shall be 'all the world' to any man."

"No, not to any man, only to *me*. Why, when you were a mere child, and I bought you your first doll, you called yourself my little wife and vowed you loved me above all the world."

"Aye, but I am a woman now," answered Clarice, gently; "I was always fond of you, Jack, and I am very fond of you still, only not quite in the way you want, and it is wicked to pretend what one doesn't feel."

"There is no need for you to *pretend* anything," said Jack, eagerly, "Clary, darling, my one pure love!"—his strong, resolute

face softened, and his voice deepened into passionate emotion—"I shall be content with so little, I have enough love for both, I can give all you need from my own full supply. I—I am not demonstrative; people who feel much never are; only those who play at passion talk about it, but I love you, God knows I do! and I have loved you all your life; not with that puny passion that lives to-day and dies to-morrow, but—" he stumbled as though his feelings could not translate themselves into words—"why, Clarice, you are *myself*! you have grown to be a part of me, and can no more tear yourself away than you could cut the body from the soul! It is not possible that you and I can go separate ways, *you* to any other man, *I* to any other woman!" He spoke with the deep earnestness of settled conviction, as though he were the voice of inexorable fate. "Clarice! my one heart's love, why

can't you give yourself to me? you profess to love my uncle, your more than father——."

"And I do love him!" exclaimed Clarice, lifting her eyes, now filled with tears, to his face, for she could not bear to hurt the meanest thing, and she knew she was hurting Jack dreadfully; "there is nothing in the world I would not do to prove it—I'd give him my very life gladly."

"That is tall talk," said Jack, with a momentary return of his usual cool manner; "you know he doesn't want your life—what good would it be to him? The days are past when heroic sacrifices were needed from men or women either; it is easy talking—the one thing, the only thing he has ever asked of you—the one thing that would make us all three happy, you will not do."

"That is nonsense!" rejoined Clarice, going straight to the point at once; "how could *I* be happy if I was forced or talked

into doing a thing I hate? for," she added, laying her hands upon his shoulder and fixing her eyes with bewildering sweetness upon his face, "it sounds dreadful, Jack—but I *should* hate even you if—if—I were forced to marry you."

"That sounds horrible," exclaimed Jack, lifting her hands down, but still holding them fast in his. Her absolute directness had thrown a new light upon the subject. "The idea of *forcing* a woman to do anything is repulsive; but I hoped you were to be *won*; it seems impossible that a great love like mine—a love not born in an hour, born of a woman's grace or a woman's beauty, but the gradual growth of a man's whole life—should fail to win love in return! But I can't grovel and beg for what I long for. If you reject me so——. But, my darling, my darling, my heart is so hungry for you—*can't* you come to me?" With a

burst of passionate emotion he clasped her in his arms, and in the next moment thrust her rather rudely from him as he exclaimed, "My God! though I hold you so close, I feel you are miles away! I would rather hold a dead woman to my heart than a body without a soul!—and yet it is hard"—he spoke half through his clenched teeth as though trying hard to keep some bad thing back, as he added, regretfully, "My fair, sweet purity! it is hard to think you can never—never be mine."

"Why don't you leave off wanting me, Jack?" she rejoined, simply; "everything would be so pleasant and easy then. Can't you let things be as they are?"

"I can—if I must," he answered

"And we will go back to our old ways," she added, "and you will be the same dear, good old Jack you've always been to me till this dreadful idea came into your head, and

I will be like a sister to you—if you will let me.”

“You may as well offer to be my grandmother,” he rejoined, gloomily; “you don’t understand things—girls never do.”

“I dare say I’m very stupid, Jack,” she answered, humbly, “but I can understand one thing well enough—I know that I have hurt you, and in hurting you I have hurt myself more; it is always worse to give pain than to endure it, especially when one must hurt those one loves.”

“Don’t be a hypocrite, child,” he exclaimed, with a harshness born of despair, for he had always hoped till now—that hope had been suddenly and surely shut out of his heart, “and misuse the word *love*! you know nothing about it.”

“I am not a hypocrite,” in an aggrieved tone; “there are many ways of loving, though you seem to think there is only one.”

"With us there is but one way; and that you will find out some time. I shall be sorry for the man when you do!" he added, grimly.

"If it makes people hard and cruel as it makes you, I hope I never shall know anything about it," said Clarice, stifling a sob. Her voice sounded full of tears, and her face looked so pale and sad, it sent a bitter pang to his heart, and caused a revulsion of feeling, with less of self and more of generosity in it. For pure, unadulterated selfishness, there is no one like a man in love; while he is fully awake to his own sufferings, his own egotistical desires, he is blind and dead to the pain and sorrow he inflicts on the object of his devotion. Her miserable face roused Jack to a sense of his selfishness; and he lashed himself with silent anathemas, low uttered under his breath. As soon as he could command his voice, he said, aloud—

“I’ve a great mind to say I’ll never forgive you for making me such a coward ! for it is cowardly to badger a poor little girl like you ; come, cheer up—don’t make me feel more of a brute !”

She blinked away her unshed tears in obedience to his desire ; and a smile like a gleam of sunshine through an April shower stole over her face.

“There, that’s right,” he said, “and we’ll try to forget that the ‘dreadful idea’ ever entered my mind !” It cost him a twinge to echo her words, but he did, adding, “and we’ll let things go on in the old way. I promise not to allude to the subject, and—there’s my hand upon it. Why, how cold yours are ! you are shivering too ! though the night is so soft and warm. Come, let us take a brisk walk and get warm together.”

Clarice rejoiced to see Jack putting on his

old self, and gladly accepted his invitation and commenced to walk briskly up and down. The twilight had died out, and the stars, like golden flowers, bloomed out of the dark blue skies ; everything was shrouded in dim obscurity. Not a feature of the landscape was discernible, and the sea, hidden away like a huge mystery, boomed thunderously upon the far-away shore below. They still paced up and down, now silent, now exchanging a few commonplace words, rather for the sake of speaking than for anything particular they had to say. They tried to lay a smooth surface over the troublous feelings that agitated them below, and, with their tongues at least, glided as far as possible away from the subject that lay nearest to their hearts. Both were sadly ill at ease ; she felt the great sorrow which any pure woman must feel at giving pain to the man who loves her, and who comes to her with the full

approval and good wishes of those nearest and dearest to her. She grieved for him, and she grieved for herself; she knew she was rejecting, and rejecting for all time, the love of a true man, a love that would never fail her through all the changing scenes of the days to come, that would cleave to her through storm and sunshine, weal and woe, to the end, and she put it from her with a regretful sigh.

She was fond of Jack, with the fondness which grows with the familiar intercourse of daily life, the pleasant, easy-going affection that makes home harmonious, and helps the machinery of the world to grind through the days and years without dragging them with discords or keeping the domestic hearth in a state of chronic irruption; but when he was proposed to her as a lover! a prospective husband! she laughed at first, and thought it was a joke; then

when her father broached the subject in all seriousness, her soul revolted from the idea.

Although there was really no blood relationship between them, she had from her earliest years been so accustomed to regard him as a dear brother that the bare notion of regarding him in any other light seemed unnatural, and filled her with dismay. With Jack things had been different from the beginning. Years ago, when his uncle with strange suddenness had brought to their grand old Devonshire home a wife and a little girl, Clarice—then a grave, silent child about six years old—he, a fine strapping youth of sixteen, had constituted himself her guardian and friend, and during all his home-staying times devoted himself to her baby pleasures; his boisterous spirits were toned down in her presence, and he left his rough boyish sports to accommodate himself to her gentle childish ways—her

nurse's place was a sinecure when Jack was at home; he played with her and amused and wandered about the woods, and over the hills with her—they were never apart, and the tall, bright-eyed youth and fair, fragile little girl grew to be familiar objects to the country people for miles round.

The sweet, strange ways of the delicate child attracted and held the boy more firmly than the most exuberant animated girlhood could have done; he watched over her through all her changing moods, through the gradual development of her nature from her quaint childhood to beautiful, mysterious womanhood. She had been the feminine study of his life, and he fancied he held her heart in his hand and could dissect it at his leisure! He knew her so thoroughly, he thought—and perhaps he did know her as well as one human being ever does know another, and that is not saying much, for

from the cradle to the grave we are living mysteries to ourselves, and double mysteries to one another. As he watched the fair young thing develope from one stage of beauty to another, his great love grew and strengthened day by day, absorbing her more and more into his life—now that she had blossomed into the full bloom of womanhood, he had stretched forth his hand to take her, to gather her to his heart, life of his life, lo ! all he had desired to have and to hold through all this side of eternity crumbled beneath his touch, and left his hand full of ashes ! He had played all his life for one stake and—lost, when he had thought it most secure. The most terrible crisis in life is always the most sudden ; we build up our hopes and wishes into one vast castle in the air, and, like a house of cards, it is blown down with a breath ! He had felt so happy and hopeful as the sun

had set, but the stars came out and found him desolate. A grey shadow fell over him—he felt like a soldier paralyzed on the march to glory! but he would recover—he knew that—and be strong, though perhaps not with the same strength again. Presently a soft voice fell upon his ear; he heard it as through a mist or fog, as it said:

“ Jack—are you angry? ”

“ Angry ! ” he echoed. “ No—why should I be? you can’t help your feelings—I can’t help mine—that’s all.” After another moment’s brief and rather embarrassing silence she spoke again, in a hesitating, nervous way :

“ Do you know that father has spoken to me about—this? ”

“ No, I did not know it,” he answered, pausing abruptly in his walk. “ He should not have done so with my consent. I prefer conducting my own affairs. Of course I

know, and have always known, that he had this matter very much at heart; but I am vexed that he should have broached the subject to *you* without first consulting *me*. I would not have the slightest pressure brought to bear upon *your* inclination. I would have you come to me of your own free will, or—not at all."

"I knew you would feel so," she rejoined. "Any man would who really cared. With father it is different. You both want one thing, but from different motives."

"Naturally, we cannot view the matter from the same standpoint. The one hope of the dear old man's life is centred in us two—in you from love, on me from pride. It really can't signify to him whom I marry, or whom you marry—with proper provisions, of course."

"*I* shall never marry anybody," she exclaimed, accelerating her pace.

He continued, without noticing her interruption: "He takes rather a financial view of the matter. Old men generally do. He regards us rather as goods and chattels. He wants to bracket us together, and hang us on his genealogical tree decorated with all his wealth and property, to have and to hold for evermore; but we don't see it, do we?"

"No," she answered, almost under her breath.

"So many lives are all writ awry in this world," he added. "It is a pity that conscience and duty won't always square with our affections."

"Yes; but I think it is a pity that conscience and duty and money should be mixed with our affections at all."

"Oh! it answers well enough, as a rule. We are exceptions. It is a kind of Prince's Mixture that keeps the pulse of the world

going. Singly no one would be strong enough for the purpose."

In spite of the bitter disappointment, the spasm of real pain that was grappling at his heart below, although his nature was stirred to its inmost depths, his little cynicisms came bubbling to the surface. He felt deeply, but hid the depths of his feelings. He was a man to suffer and be strong, to act with a brave, dauntless spirit when the hour for action came, and to leave the talking to weaker, shallower natures.

Mr. Fleming's study and library was on the ground floor, and the windows opened out upon a grassy slope just above the terraced walk where they were slowly pacing up and down. More than once he rose from his chair, went to the window and looked out upon the two shrouded figures, but dimly seen in the starlit night. He thought Clarice was overfatiguing herself;

that "Jack ought not to keep her out so long or so late." Then his grave face relaxed into a smile. "Lovers are selfish," he reflected; "he wouldn't disturb them." Somehow he felt that things were coming to a crisis, and his sanguine old heart fondly believed that the crisis must be as he most desired.

They walked up and down for a few moments longer, he holding her soft little hand with a tender pressure—he could not deny himself this luxury of feeling—a few more words passed, that said little but meant much. Neither seemed inclined to take the first step towards parting, yet both felt it would be well to say "good-night." At last Clarice spoke.

"I'm tired, Jack," she said, wearily. "If you don't mind, I think I'll go in."

"Of course," he answered, promptly. "I ought not to have kept you out so long."

For a moment both stood still and silent ; then he took her face between his hands and turned it up in the dim starlight. "Just one last word, one last look, darling," he whispered, his eyes clinging to her face, and his voice low and full of suppressed passion. "We bid good-bye to love to-night ; but we will take friendship to our heart's core, and perhaps that will be best of the two."

"Yes," she murmured below her breath.

"And in any trouble, the least or the greatest, you will turn to *me* ?"

"Oh, yes ; always, Jack," she answered, "if you won't——"

"Of course I won't," he interrupted her quickly, without giving her time to finish her sentence. Then he added, with solemn gravity : "One thing more I must say before we part. I have always had a presentiment—and it comes upon me more strongly than ever to-night—that in the one great crisis

of your life *I* shall be with you ; *I*, and no other man, shall stand beside you, whether you call for me or no ! And now good-night—good-night !” With a sudden uncontrollable impulse he caught her in his arms, and kissed her again and again with a vehemence of passion that half frightened her ; then abruptly he put her from him. “ Now go. Good-night—good-night ! ”

CHAPTER IX.

MIRIAM IN TROUBLE.

THE next day Clarice kept rigorously to her room, and as rigorously excluded all visitors from it, refusing to see any one except her maid, an elderly German, who had been with her from her childhood, and perhaps knew her, with all her changing moods, better than any one else in the world. When the breakfast-bell rang, she sent down word to say she was not coming down, and wished to have her breakfast sent to her room. The message was delivered just as Mr. Fleming and Jack had seated them-

selves at the table. They looked at each other interrogatively.

“I will go and see what is the matter with the child,” said Mr. Fleming, setting down his cup. “You kept her out too late last night, Jack. Perhaps she has got a chill; if so, we must send off at once for Dr. Parkes.”

Without waiting for Jack’s reply, he went upstairs and tapped at Clarice’s door. To his surprise she flung it wide open herself, and looked at him with a most uninvalidish air.

“Why, Clarice, my child, I thought you were not well; and I came up to see what was the matter.”

“Well!” she exclaimed, smiling, though rather vaguely. “Oh, yes, I am quite well, only I want to be alone. I’m best alone to-day; people worry me. I want to think; I don’t want to talk.” Seeing an anxious,

perturbed look come into his eyes, she reached her arms up about his neck, and the kind, grey head stooped down and kissed her as she said, reassuringly: "It is true. I am quite well, dear; only I want to think things out by myself. Ask Jack to tell you about last night," she added, lowering her voice to a whisper.

The old man returned to the breakfast-room more at ease. When it was over he and Jack retired to the library, and spent the morning there, talking, writing letters, and seemingly plunged head over ears in business matters.

The weather was not very attractive out of doors, even if they had been disposed to take advantage of it; indeed, it was the most unpleasant day of the season. The bitter winds seemed to cling to the skirts of summer; the air was reeking with a thick grey mist that almost reached the dignity of

a fog. It seemed to have no strength to clear itself off, but hovered in a hesitating sort of way, as though it could not make up its mind whether to disperse in showers of drizzling rain, or wait drifting about to see if there was a chance of the sun rising to drink it up; but the sun showed no signs of coming out and shining in its bright, happy fashion. Once or twice as the hours wore on it peeped out in a weak, watery way, just sent one solitary gleam earthward, then hastily withdrew, recognizing the fact that it was really no use trying to shine with such odds against it. So it went to rest, resolved to get up early in the morning to see what the world was about.

It was past mid-day—indeed it only wanted a few minutes to the hour when the luncheon bell would be rung—when, glancing from the library window, Jack observed a waterproofed female figure struggling

against the wind, making headway under difficulties towards the house. On the nearer approach of the much-be-bundled-up individual, it proved to be Miriam Spencer.

“What on earth can bring the girl out in such weather as this?” exclaimed Jack, as, rising up on hospitable thoughts intent, he hurried out into the hall, *sans cérémonie*, to receive and help to relieve her of her wraps.

It appeared that Clarice had written to her the day before, asking her to lunch. Possibly the events of the evening had driven the matter from her mind, for she had forgotten to mention it. Though Miriam could not have the pony-chaise, that being requisitioned elsewhere, she had braved the weather rather than be deprived of the pleasure of spending a few hours with “her dear Clarice.” Now, as it was Clarice’s desire to remain invisible for the day, the entertainment of Miriam devolved on Jack,

who was by no means loth to undertake it. The pleasure she derived from his society was so patent on the surface that in a slight degree it communicated itself to him, and he was really glad to have an agreeable occupation to work through a few heavy hours of this dreary day.

Accordingly he took Miriam into his custody, and exerted his best powers of pleasing in her behalf. He had no need to call out the reserve forces of his fascinations, for whatever he said or did was just the most delightful thing that could be said or done by mortal man. His light phrases, just touched with the gallantry which most men use in their discourse with a young and pretty woman, played like a sacred pæan on her foolish, fluttering heart.

“ Did any other man in all the world possess such eyes as his ? and did he look at any one else as he looked at her ? ”

She had observed him with the Misses Laurence and his Cousin Clarice, and certainly, she thought, his eyes wore quite a different expression when he looked at *her* ! And he—well, he was no vainer than most men ; but he did think that this icy, reserved girl was beginning to thaw beneath his benignant influence. He never thought that while he was amusing himself he was in any way acting ungenerously, or bringing any danger near to her, or raising hopes in her unsophisticated mind which he had no intention of ever realizing. Strange that a man who would punish a boy for robbing a bird's-nest will, by a series of agreeable depredations, steal a woman's heart, then call her a fool for parting with it so easily ! But Jack was getting cynical with regard to women and their feelings, and had not much belief in their hearts or their affections either.

They passed a very pleasant social hour at the luncheon table. Jack declared that she ate like a sparrow, and piled her plate with the daintiest dishes—tempting little delicacies, a great contrast to the meagre, commonplace fare at home; and Miriam had as much capacity for enjoying good things as a pronounced epicure, though not such discriminating taste. All pleasant things seemed crowding upon her at once. While her appetite was being feasted with perfect fare, her ears were being tickled with pretty nothings, and her heart trembling beneath the gaze of those wonderful dark eyes, shooting invisible arrows out of their quiet corners, and inflicting a delightful wound with every one.

Both gentlemen did their best in Clarice's absence to make things agreeable to their unexpected guest. Poor Miriam was in the seventh heaven, and thoroughly enjoyed the

unusual situation at finding herself the solitary guest in this masculine element. She had a sort of guilty feeling that she was doing wrong, or rather not doing right. Remaining there to be entertained by two gentlemen was rather an outrage on conventional propriety ; but she had not strength to withstand temptation, and perhaps enjoyed herself all the more from feeling she was feasting on forbidden fruit, never heeding whether it would impair her moral digestion or no.

When luncheon was over Mr. Fleming's attentions grew rather wearisome. He took her into his sanctum, and insisted on showing her a new beetle, a peculiarly hideous monster, with crooked horns and shining green wings ; he placed it beneath a thousand-power magnifying-glass, enlarging the hideosity to such a frightful degree that she was inclined to run away from it. He

would have spent an hour in pointing out the difference between the structure of this special object and others of the same class. He was himself so deeply interested in entomological subjects that he could not understand the indifference of other people to what in his eyes was an all-important study; but Jack came to the rescue, saying with an air of comical reproach—

“ You would hardly think that a man of my uncle’s reverend appearance and really kind heart could spend his time in hunting down these miserable objects and impaling them alive. It is a barbarous amusement.”

“ One must take a broad view of these matters, my dear boy,” said the old man, serenely; “ my researches are in the interest of science.”

“ Science has benefitted by the study of beetles ! ” observed Jack. “ I think there ought to be a society for the protection of

butterflies and beetles, as well as cats and dogs."

"The smallest thing that adds weight in the scale of science ought not to be overlooked," said Mr. Fleming, who was used to having a passage-of-arms with his nephew.

"Poor old Science!" exclaimed Jack; "if it keeps its fires alight with such tiny fuel, the sooner it is extinguished the better."

"Like the rest of the world, you are too apt to despise small things, Jack; remember, the whole world is composed of infinitesimal atoms."

"And humanity built up on chemical productions—phosphorus, lime, etc.," laughed Jack; "and the immortal soul developed through a course of roast-beef and apples, or pork and beans, and kept in its illuminating perfection by doses of champagne and brandy till the final fizz, when it takes itself off to another world."

“ You are not a bad specimen of a man and a double first, Jack,” said his uncle, restoring the beetle to its sacred shrine ; “ but you are a bad hand at philosophy.”

“ Kill philosophy and let me live ! ” exclaimed Jack, as, turning to Miriam, he added, “ When you have finished this scientific skirmishing with my uncle, Miss Spencer, perhaps you will honour me with a moment’s attention ? ” Miriam declared that she was ready to honour him at once. “ Well,” he added, “ I was going to ride over to the Rectory this afternoon, but if you will allow me I shall have much pleasure in driving you home in my dog-cart.”

She would be delighted to be so driven ; but was there no chance of her seeing Clarice, even for five minutes, before she left ?

“ I fear not—she won’t even see *me*,” said Jack.

“ She is not very well,” said Mr. Fleming ;

“and if the slightest thing ails Clarice, she prefers being alone—contrary to most women, who like to be coddled.”

“She takes after me,” exclaimed Jack. “I enjoy pain; I luxuriate in a toothache or a touch of the gout; but I like to enjoy these luxuries in private. Like the wounded bear, I would fly from the world, sit on my haunches under a juniper-tree, and suck my paws in peace.”

Miriam’s heart danced for joy at the idea of having Jack for her escort home, and as there was no likelihood of her seeing Clarice, she put on her things at once. The weather had cleared considerably, but it was still grey and dreary. The dog-cart was soon brought round, and before they started, Jack saw that she was properly shawled, and wrapped his own plaid round her. She was almost stifled and smothered by his kindness, but she would rather have died than rebelled

against his over-care ; it was so sweet to be the one object of solicitude, to be taken care of by him.

“ There, I think you are all right now,” he exclaimed, giving her a final tuck-up, as he sprang into the seat beside her ; and taking the reins and the whip from the groom, he gave it a crack, a flourish in the air, and they were off. “ Are you pretty comfortable ? ” he added, looking down upon her with a bright smile.

“ Blissfully happy ! ” her heart responded ; but her lips only said demurely, “ Quite, thank you.”

“ That’s all right,” he rejoined, heartily. “ There is still a nasty drizzling damp in the air, but we can enjoy a good spin for all that. I’ve not had much chance of getting you behind a fast trotter before, have I ? ”

She fancied from his tone that his desires in that respect had been cruelly frustrated.

“You have never invited me before,” she answered, softly.

“Ah, no,” he answered, with an accent which she translated into a regretful sigh, “I daren’t do it. I was afraid of being snubbed.” A moment’s pause, then he added, “and no man likes to be snubbed by a pretty woman!”

So they thought her beautiful too!—he did not particularize *her*, but his voice said as much.

“I—I shouldn’t have snubbed you,” she said softly, looking down, her cheeks glowing crimson.

“No? I wish you hadn’t told me that now; it is too late—if I had only known it before!”

He stopped suddenly. She glanced up in his face, but he was looking straight between his horse’s ears. She waited breathlessly for him to continue; but his thoughts

seemed to have wandered away—he had lost their thread; his attention was diverted to the horse. Presently he said, irrelevantly, “Would you mind my lighting a cigarette? Do you object to smoke?—some people like it.”

If he had asked her if she “objected” to the odour of the sewers, or perfume of stale cabbage-water, she would have answered “No! she considered both delightfully refreshing,” to such a state of imbecility had he unintentionally reduced her. Luckily he did not know the extent of the damage he had done.

He kept the mare at a fast trot; the ground seemed to fly beneath its feet. Why was he hurrying so? He was going the shortest way too! The minutes were flying, they would be home soon—too soon! and this delightful drive would be over. Why had he broken off in the middle of that

suggestive speech? He had said it was *too late*—too late for what? The words kept buzzing about her ears. He had relapsed into silence; still the ground flew beneath the horse's feet—the village was already in sight. Then a thrill of delight ran through her veins: perhaps he was shaken with agitation like herself, and from the same cause! She was inexperienced in mankind, and could not read the signs of the time. With a desperate effort she tried to evoke the spirit of speech; the words that buzzed about her brain found their way to the tip of her tongue as she echoed the words *he* had already forgotten. “You said it was ‘too late;’ what did you mean? Too late—for what?”

“Ah! yes, of course you don't understand—how should you?” he exclaimed, leaping back to the old position. “Why, too late to inaugurate a series of plea-

sant drives, which I should very much like to do."

"Why? the summer is only beginning!"

"Ay, but I am going away—I leave Penally to-morrow."

There was a moment's pause; for that moment she could not speak. Then feeling she must say something, she echoed his words, but all the light and life had died out of her voice; it sounded as though she were speaking through the mists of dream-land.

"Going away! leave Penally to-morrow!"

"Yes, I'm off to-morrow," he answered, perfectly oblivious and blind to her emotion.

"To-morrow!—that's sudden," she observed, faintly.

"It is rather sudden," he answered; re-joining cheerfully, "but don't be afraid, our yachting excursion shall come off all the same. I shall run down again in a month

or two to see how you are all getting along.” Another brief silence ; then he seemed to have some little difficulty in bringing Clarice’s name upon the *tapis*. He added, “I am glad to leave my cousin Clarice with such a dear good little friend as you. I dare say you will see a good deal of one another. I hope you will—she will be very dull else.”

Miriam mumbled some suitable reply. She was glad they were driving, glad that his attention was occupied by his mare, that he could not see her tell-tale face and read the bitter disappointment she was feeling. If he had only expressed some regret at going! Just a few words would have comforted her so much ! But then he had spoken cheerily of coming back, and alluded to their yachting excursion—that showed how much he had kept her in his mind. A grain of hope is enough to keep a hungry love alive, and

she gathered up all the crumbs that had been scattered through the last few weeks of their intimacy, and they formed quite a goodly heap in her mind's eye; and her heart, which had beaten so tumultuously a few moments ago, settled down to its old pulsation when they drove up to the Rectory door. As he lifted her from the dog-cart, she fancied he gave an extra pressure to her hand as he said—

“We have had a pleasant drive, haven't we? But you look a little tired—are you?”

“Not at all,” she answered, his tone of solicitude jarring upon her nerves, she hardly knew why; “I could have driven for hours longer.”

He tied his mare to the gate, as there was no one near to take charge of it, and followed her into the house. Mr. and Mrs. Spencer were down the village on their usual round of inspection, but were expected every minute.

"I will wait," said Jack. "I must have a few words with your father before I leave."

What could he have to say to her father? She glanced up in his face—it was inscrutable. He walked to the window, and stared out over the fields in a preoccupied way; she sat down and played nervously with her gloves.

"Mr. Swayne," she said, softly.

At the sound of his name he turned and threw himself into a chair by her side, and looked at her with responsive inquiry.

"Could you—would you mind telling me what you want to say to papa?"

Jack shook his head.

"He might not approve, you see, and then what should I do?"

"But he would—I am sure he would!" she exclaimed, a rosy flush suffusing her cheek, and a light sparkling in her eyes.

“Is it—is it anything about *me*?” she added, with alluring sweetness.

“Why, yes!” he answered; “but how came you to guess that?” She dropped her eyes and said nothing. “If I can get your father’s consent, I hope I shall have yours. I know it is a good deal to ask a girl to leave home on such short notice, and I’m afraid you’ll be rather dull up there.”

“Up where?” inquired Miriam, getting rather befogged.

“Didn’t I tell you? Well you see, we, my uncle and I, are afraid Clarice will be rather dull when I am gone. I help to keep things lively, you know. She is in low spirits, and we think if you would go up and spend a week at the Manor House, it would cheer her up.”

Before Miriam had time to recover her fluctuating senses her parents drove up to the door, and hearing their voices in the

hall, Jack went out to greet them. They were always cordiality itself to any member of the Manor House family, but Jack was a special favourite. They stood a few minutes exchanging the usual civilities, and on the trio betaking themselves to the drawing-room Miriam had disappeared. Jack soon broached the subject of his visit, which was to say "*Au revoir*," and beg them to allow Miriam to pay a week's visit to the Manor House, when, he assured them, both his uncle and Clarice would do all in their power to make the visit agreeable. They were certain of that, and sure that Miriam would have much pleasure in accepting the invitation. Mrs. Spencer waxed hospitable, and offered him tea; her husband, still more hospitably inclined, pressed him to stay to dinner. But Jack's eye caught the look of dismay on the lady's face as she ran over the resources of the larder, and doubted if

it would hold out against this additional onslaught; her anxiety was relieved by Jack's prompt refusal.

On entering her daughter's room, about an hour after Jack's departure, she was astonished to find that Miriam had flung herself upon her bed and was weeping bitterly.

"Why, Miriam, my dear child! what on earth is the matter?"

"Nothing, mamma," exclaimed Miriam, startled at her mother's unexpected coming.

"Nothing!" echoed Mrs. Spencer, with incredulous emphasis.

"I mean, nothing particular," replied Miriam, with a watery ghost of a smile. "I—I'm overtired I think, and a little nervous."

"Nervous! fiddlestick!" repeated Mrs. Spencer, still more incredulously. "Our family have never been afflicted with nerves;

and the idea of your setting up such things is simply ridiculous ! ”

However, she looked rather anxiously at Miriam's pale face and swollen eyes, while she ran over in her mind every possible disease that came with those symptoms.

“ It has been a very sudden seizure, my dear child,” she added, feeling her pulse and her hot hands sympathetically. “ I'm afraid you are sickening for something dreadful. A stitch in time saves nine—I'll send for Dr. Parkes at once.”

“ Please don't, Mamma ; indeed I'm not ill—not sickening for anything. If you will leave me alone for a little while I shall be all right.”

The idea of Mrs. Spencer letting anybody alone, while there was a chance of getting anything out of them by a system of inquisitorial worry ! As soon would a dog

leave worrying a bone or a cat a mouse while there was a pulse of life in it! She sat down, looking puzzled and bewildered, watching Miriam as she bathed her eyes and smoothed her disordered hair. She was not going to be shut out of her daughter's confidence, while there was a crevice through which she could creep into it. The possibility of a young nature having any secret sacred thoughts or feelings never entered her mind; to her there was nothing sacred outside the Bible. Her inquisitorial process drew nothing from Miriam but silence and fresh falling tears. She probed her on every side. At last a light seemed slowly to break upon her. She gazed at Miriam with wondering astonishment as she said—

“Why, Miriam, child!—but it is impossible, it *can't* be!” Then she added, disgusted with accents, “*Surely* you are

not crying because that young man's going away!" Could any girl plead guilty to such an accusation?

"Don't say that, Mamma!" said Miriam, deprecatingly; "if you knew how it hurt me, you wouldn't."

"You had better confide in me, and tell me all about it. I thought no good would come of your intimacy up there. But it is a wicked world! How far have things gone between you? It is most dishonourable of a man to entangle a young woman without her parent's knowledge!" she added, her wrath rising on her daughter's silence. "I will speak to your father; he shall go up to the Manor House and have things put straight. I'll have no crooked dealings with my family! Though we are Christians, we can't submit to be trampled on." Then struck by a sudden thought, she added, "And who knows but their handsome sub-

scriptions may be some devil's bait ! But I'll soon find out."

Miriam struck in, in great alarm—

"Oh, Mamma ! Mamma ! Don't speak of such dreadful things ! I should die of shame. There is not, there never has been, anything between me and Mr. Swayne."

"And do you mean to say that you have fallen so low as—as to be in love with a man without any encouragement ? why, that's worse and worse ! A daughter of mine—brought up on my own principles too ! I declare it is quite shocking ; you can't be in your right mind !"

"Nobody is ever always quite right in everything," murmured Miriam.

"Don't talk in that heathenish way," retorted her mother ; "no proper well-regulated mind ever allows itself to go wrong. Well, I've always heard that women are weak creatures, but I never thought a child

of mine would be accused of weakness ; but if you take all the blame on yourself, and assure me that he has made no advance, never said anything——”

“He *never* has,” exclaimed Miriam, anxious to do justice to the unconscious Jack ; “but—I think—he sometimes looked as though he wanted to !”

“Bah ! if a man wants to say a thing, he generally says it !”

“Jemima ! Jemima !” sounded the Rector’s voice, calling up the stairs.

“Oh stop, Mamma !” exclaimed Miriam, as Mrs. Spencer was about to hurry out in answer to his call. “Don’t say anything to vex papa ; indeed there is no need.”

“I wouldn’t say anything to him for all the world,” answered Mrs. Spencer solemnly ; “he would be too much horrified and distressed, and I don’t know where the end of it would be.” Her portentous, melancholy

tone roused Miriam's spirit at last, and she exclaimed, with a touch of anger in her voice—

“There has been *no* beginning; and I don't see why you should talk in such a way, as though some one had done some dreadful thing. There is no wrong anywhere. If you had not surprised me, you would never have known whether I have any heart, any feeling or not. Surely there can be no harm in thinking well of, and caring a little for, a good, true man, whom one has—seen—so much of”—and Miriam nearly broke down again.

“There are two kinds of good—good and good-for-nothing; and most men belong to the good-for-nothing class.”

“Jemima! Jemima!” called the impatient Rector again.

“There, my dear, dry your eyes,” she added, patting the girl's cheek and giving it an affectionate peck—her nearest approach

to a caress ; “ I am not angry. I think you can’t be well ; you’re feverish. Say your prayers ; and you shall go through a little course of medicine, and you’ll soon get over this folly. These things have a great deal to do with the liver.”

With this last scrap of consolation, she departed. Nevertheless she was feeling greatly exercised in mind to find the least crack in the Spencerian armour ! That there should be any fallibility in the family was a shock and a surprise to her ; and that that fallibility should break out on Miriam’s side—Miriam, who had been cut out on her own pattern, nourished on her own principles—was the greatest surprise of all.

CHAPTER X.

AFTER A STORM.

AFTER spending a few hours in considering the situation fairly from all points of view, Jack decided that it would be wisest and best in all ways that he should leave the Manor House for a time, till they—his uncle, Clarice, and himself—had grown accustomed to the changed state of affairs; his absence would relieve them all from temporary constraint and embarrassment. While they were all three under one roof, meeting and mingling their daily lives together, the ghost of the old long-cherished hope would stir in their hearts—it would

not be laid beyond the pale of resuscitation. Although *he* knew it was dead, and could no more be raised to life than could the dead lying fathoms deep beneath the sea, yet he could not persuade his uncle to that effect. The old man clung to his cherished idea with obstinate pertinacity in the face of the most adverse facts; it had grown so deep-rooted in his heart as to be a part of himself, and he could no more tear it out than you could tear up the roots of an old tree, without killing the tree itself. Although Jack had explained things in the plainest and most decided manner, taking upon himself the chief blame of crossing his uncle's will, rather than laying the burden on Clarice's shoulders, Mr. Fleming shook his head impatiently, unbelievably.

“ Things might be a little crooked just now, but something would happen some day to show Clarice what was good for her.

Meanwhile, there need be no hurry ; of course Jack could run away as he proposed, for a few months, and then come back and see how things were then."

By no means, by no argument, could the old man be brought to loose his hold from the one fixed point, viz., that his favourite sister's son and the daughter of the one woman who had made all life's light for him should become man and wife, to have and to hold one common inheritance, and unite the wandering currents of two lives in one, thence to flow on through generations yet unborn in peace and love—knitting up the unravelled and broken past into a perfect pattern outspread in the future. It was a romantic craze, harmless enough so long as it was self-indulged, only dangerous when engaged upon the strong endeavour to draw together two natures which were set in opposite directions ; and then dangerous to

a degree that neither could realize till the hour of trial should come. However, for the present all was amicably arranged—the long morning conference had settled that. Jack was to start as soon as possible, the very next day indeed—as he had informed Miriam Spencer. But of course he must have an interview with Clarice before he started; he would see her that evening if possible.

On reaching home his first inquiry was for Clarice. “How was she? and had she left her room yet?” Yes, but she had kept in her room till nearly five o’clock, and then took a sudden resolution to go out for a walk. “Is my uncle with her?” he inquired, his brow contracting to a frown. “No; she was gone before any one even knew that she was going, and left word with Hans.” For a moment he was inclined to be angry that she had been allowed to go

out on such a day alone, especially as she had been disturbed and unwell; then he reflected that she was always erratic in her movements, and no one of the household could, of course, in the slightest degree control her coming and going. Without another word, he turned on his heel and went in search of her.

It was already dusk, and a drizzling rain was beginning to fall. Which way had she gone? He pondered for a moment, and then decided that it was most likely she had gone down to the shore; she loved the sea in all its changing moods: no doubt he should find her there now, her restless spirit, perhaps, growing calmer in contemplating the more restless waves. Thither he bent his steps, casting searching glances round him as he went along. Presently, about half a mile from home, he fancied he saw something light moving among the trees..

He hurried towards it ; he soon discovered that it was a woman's skirts, and, on a still nearer approach, that the woman was Clarice herself. She was standing still now ; in another moment he was standing by her side. She looked up in his face, laughed quietly as she said—

“ I knew you were coming—that's why I stood still. I could have led you a nice dance if I had liked, for I can run faster than you.”

“ How did you know I was coming ?—you couldn't have seen me, for I came up from behind. I trod lightly lest I might frighten you.”

“ My heart heard you, I think. We often hear and see in a strange, mysterious way, without the use of either eyes or ears ; don't you ? ”

“ I think, Clarice dear, you give your 'mind's eye' too much liberty,” replied

Jack; "and I am sure we had better make haste to get home. You must be mad to go wandering through the wet woods on such a day as this—and in those flimsy rags too," he added, glancing at her light dress.

"Don't call my pretty dress a 'flimsy rag,'" she answered; "and don't be cross, please, Jack dear!" she added coaxingly. "I've been think—think—thinking in the house all day, till I felt stifled—as though the walls would fall in and crush me. I was obliged to come out. I can breathe now; the soft winds and the rain have done me good. You know the weather never hurts *me*. If there had been a storm of thunder and lightning I should have revelled in it."

"Come, let us hurry on, dear girl, and revel by the fireside; that will be the best revelling for you. And—I want to talk to

you—there is something I wish to say to you.”

“I shall be glad,” she answered, half-breathlessly, as he hurried her along so fast in his anxiety to get her out of the damp air, holding up the dripping branches for her to pass under. Presently, as they neared the house, glancing with a look of anxious inquiry into his face, she said—

“Jack, have you spoken to father yet—about—about what we talked of last night?”

“Yes; I explained the situation fully to him,” answered Jack.

“And is he angry?” she inquired. “The dear old dad! I can’t bear to vex him.”

“You need not be disturbed in the slightest degree,” he answered, reassuringly; “he’ll never say a word to you upon the subject—I don’t suppose he’ll ever allude to it.”

“Ah! but I shall know by his face if he

is feeling badly. It is not what he says, but what he feels, I care about," she said.

"There, run away and change your wet clothes!" he exclaimed, as they entered the house. "Come down again as soon as you can; we have not too much time to spare, for I must leave to-morrow. There, not a word till you have changed your things. I'll wait for you in the morning-room."

The process of changing did not take her very long; in the course of a few minutes she came down again. She had thrown on a negligée wrapper of pale blue, arranged with clouds of creamy lace; her beautiful golden hair, smoothed back with a band of blue ribbon, tumbled in a mass of graceful coils and curls about her shoulders. A flush of excitement was on her cheeks and in her eyes as she hurried forward, laid her hand upon his shoulder, and said—

“Is it true, Jack! Are you really going away—at once?”

He thought he had never seen her look so lovely; her touch thrilled him through, and her face, in eager inquiry, was lifted so near to his, he could feel the perfume of her breath upon his cheek; his eyes clung to her, and his heart yearned over her. He was seized with a double impulse—the one was to shake her from him in despair, the other was to clasp the sweet lithe form in his arms and never let her go; but he mastered that impulse, and with compressed lips kept himself well in hand. He released himself gently from her touch and seated her on the lounge, himself beside her.

“Yes,” he said, in a matter-of-fact way, “I’m going. I’ve been dawdling about a long time. I couldn’t leave you in all the disorder of the move, you know; but I ought to be in town now. I’ve many little

matters of business to look after—and, however much one may be tempted, it doesn't do to neglect one's duties," he added, with an imposing air, which, however, failed in imposing either upon himself or her. Both knew the key-note of his action, and both ignored it.

"No," said Clarice, "it doesn't do to neglect things. Of course we shall miss you dreadfully; but it is right you should go."

"Yes, it is right," he answered, with a deep-drawn breath.

"And I wish you would give up amusing yourself, Jack," she added. "We always hear so much of your going here, and going there, and mixing in all sorts of gaieties; but we never hear of your doing, or thinking of doing, anything."

"My dear girl, I've been thinking of doing something all my life!" he answered; "sometime I dare say I shall go into action."

“If you only would, Jack! Father thinks so much of you; and if you could only make a name in the world, he would be so proud. And you could if you liked—you are clever enough for anything; already you are a barrister-at-law.”

“Full fledged. I have gone through a course of gluttony, and eaten my way to that lofty eminence as a grub eats its way to the heart of a cabbage.”

“But, having got so far, you can surely do something more,” she added, eagerly. “Go into court and make speeches; I’m sure you’d be able to talk and cross-examine, and confuse and befog everybody, as well as the greatest lawyer.”

“No doubt I could,” he answered; “but so far on my travels through life I have never found a solicitor insane enough to trust me with a brief. You see I labour under one great disadvantage: I am naturally

of a dilatory, ease-loving disposition, and not being obliged to work, I lie idle and bask in the sun. I consider that a comfortable competence is absolute ruin to an intelligent man—none but fools ought to be born with silver spoons in their mouths. I quite share your lofty opinion of my capabilities, and believe that if I had been taken by the scruff of the neck, like a blind puppy, and flung into the world's whirlpool, I should have opened my eyes and struck out for the shore."

"I never know how far you are joking or how far you are serious, Jack," said Clarice; "but I do know, and I am sure father agrees with me, that no man ought to lead such an idle life as—as you do. Even if a man is rich enough to live without work, wealth entails its obligations, and he ought to do something, if not for the good of himself, for the good of his country."

"For the good of his country!" echoed Jack. "Ah! now that sounds important. Well, I don't suppose I shall ever be a brilliant head-light to my country, but I'll try—I really will try."

"Do," she rejoined, encouragingly; "for if things were to go wrong with you, I should reproach myself for having done something towards spoiling your life."

"No true man allows his life to be spoilt by a woman. No offence—but you know you are a woman, Clary!"

"A woman—yes; but how I wish I were a man!" she answered.

"Do you? Well, a woman is never satisfied; if you were a man, you'd soon wish to be something or somebody else."

"Perhaps!" she exclaimed, reflectively. "If I could choose, I should like to be something that can neither *think* nor *feel*."

"An octopus, or a jelly-fish, eh?" he

suggested, looking down upon the lovely face ; and in dread lest he should be betrayed into sentimental wanderings, he rushed into the opposite direction, and got as far as possible away from any tender or emotional utterance. "I am afraid, as we can't choose the casing for our immortal souls, you will have to get along to the end of this world as a mere woman ; in the next, matters may be arranged more to the general satisfaction."

"Ah, the next !" she sighed ; "but it is such a long, weary while before we get there, Jack, and the travelling here is through such hard and stony ways. I should like to go to sleep *here*, and wake up and find myself *there* in the morning."

"I fancy we all have rather a hankering after the impossible," replied Jack. "For my part, I regard this world as a place for preliminaries, where we work hard for honours,

and take our degree on the higher planes of the next ; meanwhile it is well to be content in our wanderings here—contentment is a great virtue.”

“Is it ?” she answered. “*I think content is the poorest and most miserable of all the virtues. Why every well-fed beast is content ; the very ass browsing on his meal of thistles is the picture of a beautiful content !*”

“If he is a wise ass, he is,” exclaimed Jack, “because he has no chance of getting anything better. We should do well to follow his example.”

“I don’t think so,” said Clarice. “If people were content with things as they are, nobody would ever try to make them better. Why every improvement, and all the progress the world has ever made, is due to the discontent of some special set of people——”

At this moment Mr. Fleming broke in upon their interview, entering the room with rather an anxious expression of face.

“You are just in time to save me, Uncle,” exclaimed Jack, genially. “Clarice is trying to entangle me in a philosophical discussion, and I know her wits will so far outstrip mine I shall be lost.”

The cloud cleared from the old man's face; he was delighted to find them conversing in so amicable a spirit, with no cloud or the least constraint between them; and so far from showing any vexation towards Clarice, which she had feared he might do, he was, if possible, more tender than ever to her. He had been fretting about her and things generally all the day, and it was a great relief to find her looking like her best self. The order of things seemed to be suddenly changed, and having once left the seclusion of her room, she did not

return to it, but came down to dinner dressed with even more care than usual, with a bunch of purple violets on her breast and in her hair—Jack's favourite flowers. She was more charming and in brighter spirits than ever. It might be that she was too troubled to allow play to her natural feelings, and masked her real agitation of spirit beneath an assumption of gaiety which she was very far from feeling. It often happens that smiles are on the lips while tears lie heavy on the heart.

She seemed to bring the whole battery of her charms to bear upon, and endeavour to break down, the outworks of fortitude and resolve behind which Jack had entrenched himself. If she had been the most accomplished coquette she could not have used her fascinations more dexterously; whereas, she was really too innocent to be actuated by any coquettishness whatever:

she only *seemed* gay, and carried the seeming to excess to save herself from breaking down altogether. Jack entered into her humour thoroughly, though he was not at all deceived by her poor little affectations; he quite comprehended her real state of mind, and appreciated her endeavour to make these, his last hours at home, pass pleasantly, with no visible restraint nor painful episodes. He felt sorry for her, sorry for his own bitterly disappointed hopes, but no grain of anger against *her*. Altogether she made his going away a festive occasion, rather than one of regret.

She retired early to bed, evidently tired and overwrought, for there were dark circles round her eyes, and the corners of her mouth drooped painfully. As he watched her slowly ascending the stairs, he felt she was carrying the light of the world away with her.

He departed the next morning with no more leave-taking, no more last words. It was best so, for last words are unsatisfactory things ; all had been said that need be said. So far all was well.

The proposed visit of Miss Spencer to the Manor House fell through, as might have been expected, as Jack's informal invitation had not been supplemented by any urgency on Clarice's part, and Mrs. Spencer threw cold water on the idea.

The days passed on ; the absence of Hugh, so speedily followed by that of Jack, completely changed the aspect of life at the Manor House—indeed, of Penally generally. The brisk intimacy between the young people seemed to flag somehow ; it needed the masculine element to keep it stirring and strong. Sometimes it showed signs of dying out altogether. Where there are no warm sympathies, it needs some exertion to keep

even a weakly friendship alive. Thus it happened that Clarice and Mr. Fleming were more closely allied than ever, for their constant companionship had been temporarily broken by the influx of young people—which was quite natural; now they gradually fell back into their old ways.

They wandered about the garden, planning and directing the manifold improvements and alterations, superintending the erection of new greenhouses, the making of forcing-beds, etc., watching with great interest the things that were growing under their own eyes. They would take long rambles through the woods, over the hills, or along the shore; he endeavouring to train her in his way of thought, and imbue her with his love of research, from small matters deducing great arguments. She always received his teaching with profound respect, but little understanding. Like most

scientific men, he used big words for small matters, which confused rather than enlightened her mind; still she grew more and more interested in his pursuits. This might arise from the absence of any other mode of excitement. His attempts to train and teach her in the regular scientific mode failed miserably; but when he dropped technicalities, and talked in a pleasant gossip kind of way, she was interested and instructed at the same time. In one of their ramblings 'through the woods they came upon a wide pond or pool, partially overgrown with weeds and long rank grasses, where myriads of tiny atoms were swimming, crawling, or darting hither and thither upon the muddy banks or in the stagnant water. It was a wild, weird spot, with tall trees and tangles of green luxuriant branches stretching over and interlacing above it, lying out of sight far from the woodland

path; so lonesome and out of the way, indeed, one could easily imagine some ghastly crime lying silent and dumb beneath the dark mysterious waters. In fact, some tradition thereof lingered among the old folk of the neighbourhood, but it was too far away to be talked or thought much of—things fade away from the memory as a reflection fades from a looking-glass.

“What a damp, disagreeable place, father dear,” exclaimed Clarice, holding up her skirts and peeping through the branches as he went downwards towards the pool.

“It is not an attractive place,” he answered, “but I am seeking for one of the wonders of nature, and it is here I hope to find it.” In the course of a few minutes he came back to her with something swimming about in his green glass bottle.

“Why, it is nothing but a nasty mean

little ugly tadpole!" exclaimed Clarice, inspecting it with disgust.

"It is one of the wonders of nature, my dear child," he answered. "I have got it expressly for you, that you may watch with your own eyes this mud fish, this limp, boneless, gill-breathing bit of animation, develope into a perfect terrestrial creature, with heart and lungs, brain and bones, with sharp eyes and four swift, restless legs; in fact, you may watch this miserable little fish change to the lively frog! Why, the legerdemain and magic tricks of Messrs. Maskelyne and Cook, which people flock to see and wonder at, are nothing compared with this miracle of nature, which takes place every minute of every day, in every muddy pond or pool, under our own eyes, without waking a wonder or a thought! Yet it is in contemplating these small things we may read the great lesson of

evolution throughout the whole world of nature, of which man is the most godlike production. I can't understand how people can watch the little crawling caterpillar change into the bright beautiful butterfly, and doubt that they themselves have evolved from some other inferior creature ! The law of the universe, from the mighty suns and stars in heaven to the tiniest thing that creeps or grows on earth, is one of constant progression, and why should man suppose that *he* alone stands aloof, exempt from this one great general law ? It takes perhaps a few weeks, or months, or days, to perfect an inferior creature ; while it has taken millions and millions of years to produce perfect man, at present the highest and noblest type of creation."

"I don't think—I don't care about other creatures !" exclaimed Clarice ; " but I like to think that *we* were made in the image of

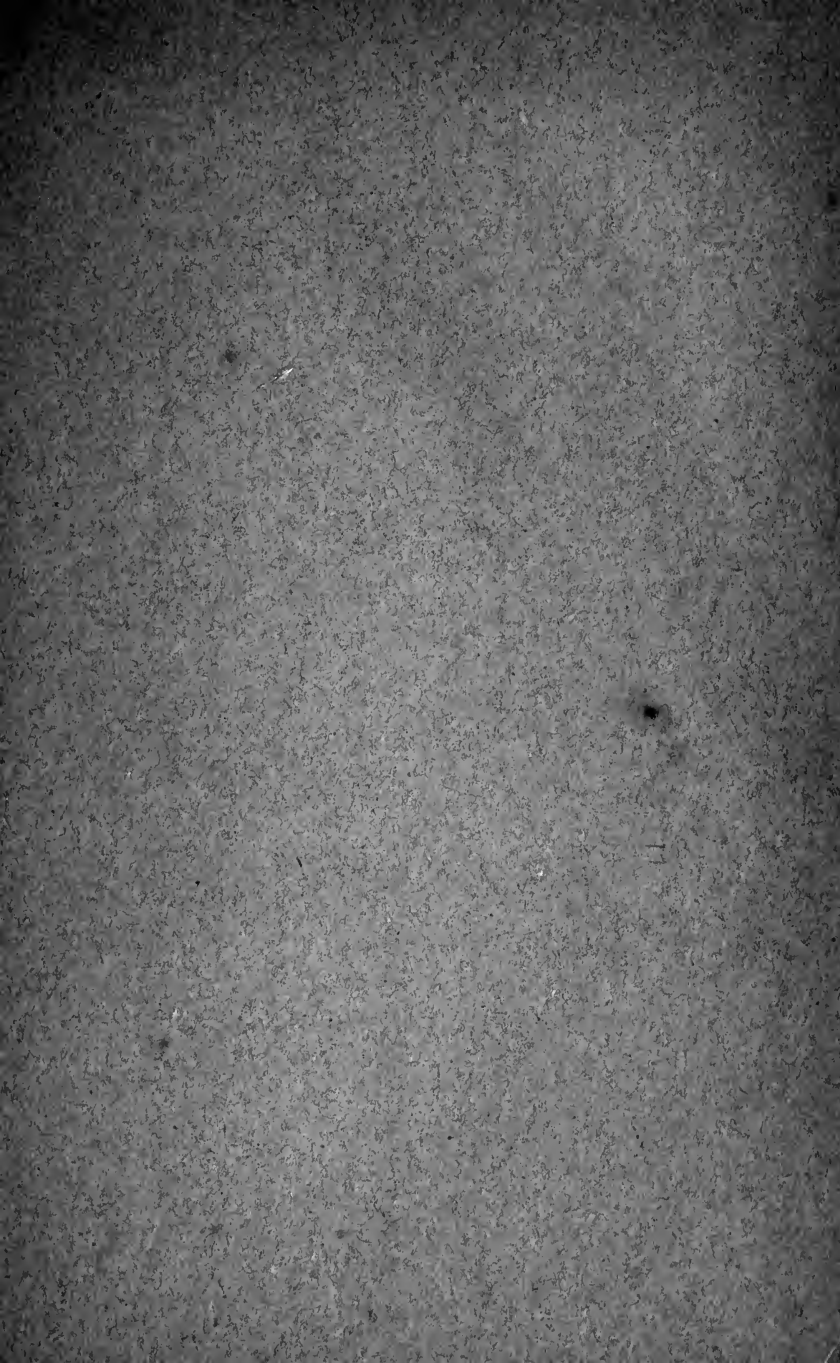
our Creator, and sent down fresh from the hand of God, to live in an earthly paradise for awhile till we are called back to Him."

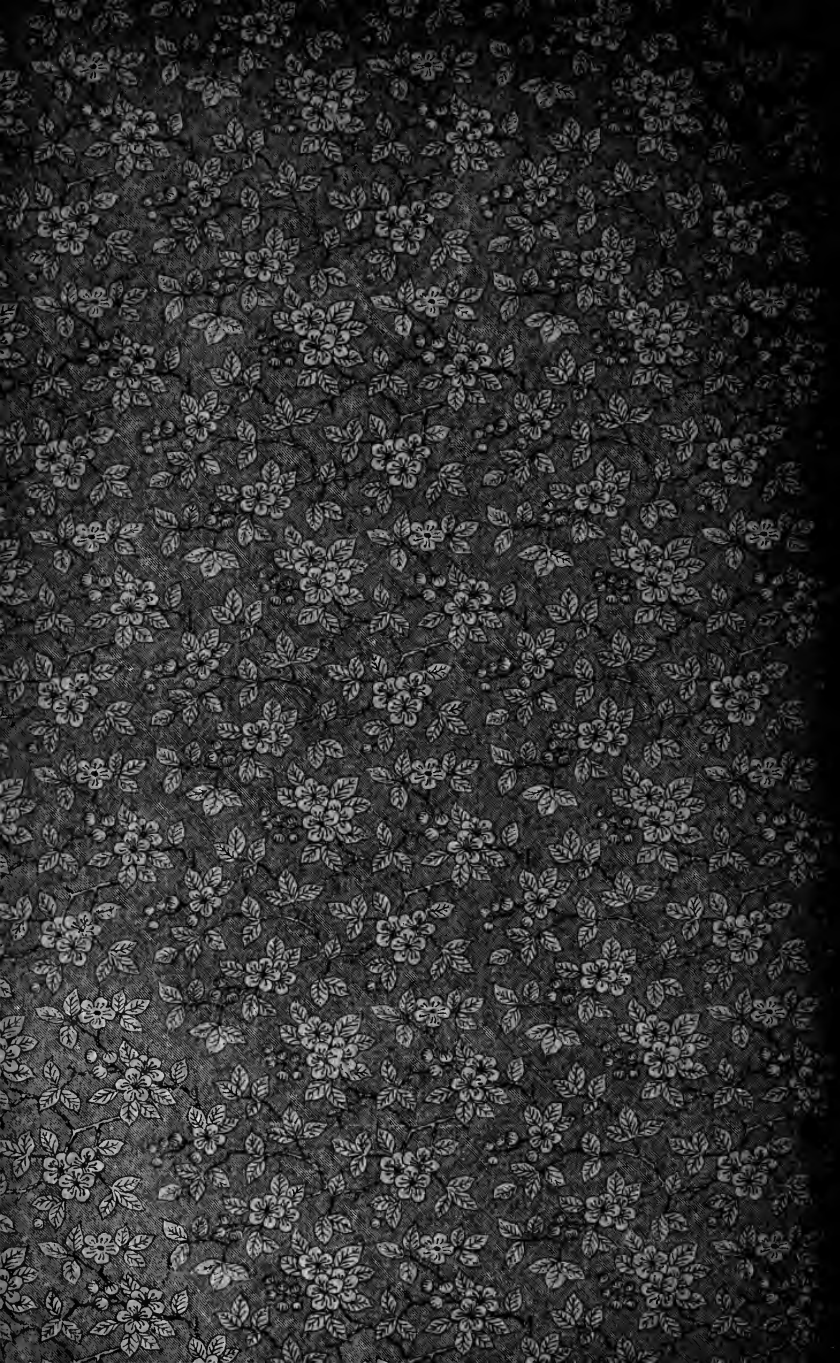
"Like many older and wiser folk than yourself, my child," he answered, "you would rather hug a pleasant fiction than face a solemn fact. Well, if it makes you happy, I suppose it is all right: those who are earnest in their search for truth are not so easily satisfied."

So the days passed on. Although there was no bright sunshine in the moral atmosphere of the Manor House, nor any outward excitements, there was no internal commotion; life glided on in a serene, quiet fashion, as though time greased its wheels that none might see how stealthily it was stealing away the days and hours, so quickly and imperceptibly the days glided by, as only uneventful days do pass. It is the

stirring, joyous time, full of events and flushed with triumph, that swells and lengthens the passing hour, and makes us feel that we have lived a lifetime in a single day. And yet during these calmer hours which we count as nothing, the wheels of the gods are grinding slowly; the invisible hands of the three weird sisters are weaving our destiny, tracing the paths that we must travel, whether we will or no.

END OF VOL. I.







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